MARGUERITE'S
HERITAGE
BY
MRS. GEORGIE
SHELDON

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Marguerite's Heritage

OR

LOVE AFTER MARRIAGE

By MRS. GEORGIE SHELDON

AUTHOR OF

"The Masked Bridal," "Faithful Shirley," "Edrie's Legacy," "Max," "Trixy," Etc.

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MARGUERITE'S HERITAGE

Marguerite's Heritage

CHAPTER I

A TARDY PROPOSAL

"CONSTANCE, I love you—I have loved you for years. I believe that you love me. Will you give yourself to me—will you be my wife?"

The speaker was a noble-looking young man of perhaps twenty-five years, tall and stalwart of form and splendidly developed, with the head and brow of a king—a face into which one needed to look but once to know that the grandeur of the outward appearance was but the expression of the inner nature.

A wealth of nut-brown hair crowned his broad, open forehead. A pair of wine-brown eyes, clear as pools of living water, looked earnestly out at you from beneath straight, smooth brows—thoughtful brows such have always seemed to me, for I have noticed that people who think most deeply and intelligently usually have straight brows.

His cheeks glowed with the hue of perfect health, his nose was a straight line, his mouth at this moment was gentle and tender in expression as a woman's, yet with a suggestion of strength in its decided curves which indicated a firm and self-reliant character.

He looked very grave and earnest just now as he gazed down upon the beautiful girl who was standing before him with averted eyes and a flushed and troubled face, his lips trembling with suppressed emotion.

"Constance!"

The name dropped from him pleadingly, yet with a sharp note of pain in his tone.

The girl lifted a pair of dark gray-blue eyes to her lover's face, and he caught his breath as he read his fate in their sad, regretful expression.

"Laurence—I cannot," she faltered.

"Cannot!" he repeated in a tone of agony. "What does that mean, my darling?"

"Oh, Laurie! I did not know—I did not think that——" she began, with sorrowful earnestness.

"You did not know—you did not think, what?" Laurence Everet cried with eager tenderness as he searched the lovely but perplexed face before him.

"That you cared for me like this—that you would

ever wish me to be your—wife," she breathed as a burning blush was succeeded by an excessive pallor.

"You did not know that I loved you!" her companion exclaimed in a sharp tone of intense surprise.

The girl shivered slightly; she was exceedingly sensitive, and his tone jarred upon her.

"Oh, yes, Laurie, I have always known that you cared for me; but I supposed it was with the same friendly feeling that I regarded you," she replied, with some agitation. "We have known each other all our lives, and I have looked upon you as a—as a brother——"

"A brother!" interrupted the wounded lover, passionately. "When I have called you 'little wife' a thousand times! Oh, Constance!" he went on, with increasing earnestness, "it has been the dream of my life, ever since I was a boy of fifteen, that when the proper time came for me to tell you how I have worshiped you, your own heart would respond to mine and you would give yourself to me. My one love—my darling! you must love me—I cannot live without you! Oh, tell me, dear, that you will try. Perhaps you do not know your own heart yet, and in time I shall be able to win it. Ah! my life will be ruined—there will be no happiness in the future for me if I am to lose you——"

"Laurie! Laurie!" the young girl broke forth, in a voice of wild appeal. "Don't say that! Pray

do not make me feel that I am to be responsible for anything so dreadful. I could not bear it—indeed I could not. I must be honest with you. I must not let you live on hoping for what can never be, for—" and now the rich blood surged up to the soft waves of hair lying upon her brow, dyeing her whole face crimson—"for I am already pledged to another."

"Oh, Heaven! Not that—Constance!" her name broke from him in a sharp tone of agony, as if some one had suddenly given him a mortal wound, and he staggered backward a pace or two, his face becoming as white as the spotless dress which she wore. "It cannot be true," he continued. "I could not lose you like that. Oh, my darling, unsay those cruel words."

"I cannot unsay them, Laurence," she returned, sadly, "for they are true."

She paused an instant, then she drew in a deep breath and went on in a low but firm tone, as if she felt that it would be better to have the whole truth told at once:

"I am promised to Noel Southworth—I am to be married to him three weeks from to-day."

The young man seemed stricken dumb by this terrible and unexpected announcement, and a look of agony and despair settled over his face which made the sensitive girl shiver and shrink before it.

For a minute he appeared like one paralyzed; then, bending forward, he seized the fair white hands of his companion, and, searching her face as if he would read her most secret thought, he cried out, sternly:

"Married! to Noel Southworth in three weeks! Do you love him—love him as I love you? Constance, tell me truly, as you hope for your own future happiness and mine."

The fair girl lifted a wondering look to him, as if, somehow, her relations to her betrothed had suddenly assumed a new meaning to her—as if all at once she experienced a feeling of vague regret that she had never until now realized the fact of Laurence Everet's boundless love for her.

"Yes," she faltered. "I—love him."

But her beautiful eyes fell beneath the searching gaze of her companion, and she gently tried to release her hands from his clasp.

Something very like a sob escaped him as he released them and folded his arms tightly across his breast, while he said in shaking tones:

"Then—I hope that you may be happy, Constance. I would not lay the lightest obstacle in the path you have chosen; but oh—— Ah!" as he resolutely forced back the words of wild despair that arose to his lips, "I have no right to murmur at or question the step you have taken. And

yet—" he bent toward her again eagerly, scanning her pale, troubled face—"somehow I cannot quite give you up, even though what you have told me is sufficient to make me abandon all hope—something tells me that you will yet be my wife. Nay, dear—" as she opened her lips as if about to protest against so wild an assertion—"let me have the small comfort of this apparently hopeless hope, for I love you, my darling—I shall love only you as long as I live. And, Constance, dear, if—" his voice trembled and a deadly whiteness settled about his mouth—"if ever life should go wrong with you and you need a—a friend, you will not fail to let me know——"

"Oh, Laurie! you talk as if we were never to meet again!" the fair girl broke forth, with starting tears, while she threw out her hand toward him with a gesture of sorrowful appeal that smote him keenly.

"It is better that we should not meet again," he replied. "I shall go away. I cannot remain where there will be so much to remind me that my life has been bereft of all hope. You have told me that you have given your heart to another, that you will soon be the wife of another. How can I live here when you are gone? Oh, Constance! are you sure that you love Noel Southworth well enough to spend your life with him? Search your heart and

be sure that you make no mistake—tell me, dear!"

Again Constance lifted a wistful, half-frightened look to him, his solemn charge having awakened strange emotions within her.

"Yes," she returned after a moment of oppressive silence, "I love him—I am betrothed to him—I shall marry him."

But her voice sounded strangely uncertain for one who was so soon to decide the question of a lifetime.

A heavy sigh burst from her companion.

"Then good-by, my own love. I will call you that in spite of all, for I feel that you belong to me, and something tells me that neither your life nor my own will be complete apart from each other. Farewell, Constance, and may Heaven bless you."

He stooped for one last long look into her eyes, then touched his lips softly, reverently, to her forehead, and was gone—before she realized his intention, or could utter one word in response to his heartbroken adieu.

She stood for a moment gazing, half dazed, at the spot where he had been, then, with a sob of passionate grief, threw herself upon the ground and bowed her face upon the rustic seat which, years ago, Laurence had made with his own hands for her,

and which had been a favorite resort with them both ever since they were little children.

"Laurie! Laurie!" she cried, while tears poured like rain over her cheeks, "must I lose you like this —playmate of my childhood, my friend, my bro——"

She checked herself suddenly in the utterance of this word, and a wave of crimson swept up to her brow; then she fell to weeping afresh.

Laurence Everet and Constance Alexander had lived side by side since early childhood.

Their parents had been upon terms of closest friendship, and thus their children had always experienced almost as much freedom in one home as in the other.

Thus Constance and Laurence had grown up together. They had attended the same school, shared the same sports, read the same books, and practiced the same music; and as the years went by the noble-hearted boy learned to worship the fair, sweet girl, who was his ideal of all that was most beautiful and lovable.

His whole life was filled with thoughts and hopes and plans of which she was the sum and centre. He never arranged for anything from which she was to be left out—no excursion or pleasure was complete without her. In every thought for the future she formed a part, and the first great trial of his

life came to him when they graduated from the high school and he went away to college.

It never occurred to him that she did not regard him with the same fond devotion that animated him.

She had always seemed happiest when with him; her dolls, her books, or her work were always unhesitatingly cast aside whenever he proposed any amusement for their mutual enjoyment, and they would spend hours together without any flagging of interest on her part in what entertained him.

Thus he had come to believe that when the right time should come for him to confess the dearest hopes of his heart, she would readily and joyfully respond to his affection and become his affianced wife.

He told himself that this should be immediately upon his graduation, for his father had promised him a European trip upon the conclusion of his studies, and he thought he could not bear so long a separation without some definite hope for the future to cheer him during his absence.

Several members of his class were to sail on the Saturday following commencement day, and earnestly entreated him to make one of their party.

His parents thought well of it, but there was very little time in which to make his preparations, and it was only on the evening before his departure

that he could find an opportunity for an interview with Constance.

But she had been taken suddenly ill that day, and so he was forced to leave her with only a few hastily spoken words of farewell, and this in the presence of others.

At first he thought he would write and lay his heart bare before her; then he feared that she would think him cowardly not to have gone to her and frankly confessed his love, instead of waiting to write it from a distance.

He would be absent only a year, he told himself, and upon his return he would speak and all would be well. Indeed, it would only be a matter of form, he assured himself, since he believed that she belonged to him, heart and soul, as he to her.

But, alas! he was far too sanguine in his expectations, as he realized when it was too late; for during this year of his absence Constance met her fate in the person of Noel Southworth.

He was a dashing, merry-hearted, genial young man, toward whom almost every one was at first instinctively attracted.

He was heir to a snug fortune, a man who had mingled much in society and traveled a great deal. He was handsome, too, with a rich, dark, Southern beauty that was very attractive to young maidens, and a person of warm impulses where his own com-

fort and pleasure were not at stake, but sadly lacking in the high moral principle and strength of character which Laurence Everet possessed.

Constance had met him for the first time in New York City, whither she went to spend the latter portion of the winter with an aunt who wished to introduce her to society.

Man of the world though he was, and accustomed to be smiled upon and petted by many noted beauties, Noel Southworth was instantly attracted by this pure and lovely girl from the country, and from the moment of their introduction began to pay her the most devoted attention, and utterly unmindful of the pouts of the fashionable belles upon whom he had previously showered his favors and their frowning mammas.

In less than three weeks after their first meeting he had hopelessly lost his heart to her, and at the end of two months he was her declared lover.

Mrs. Williams, Constance's aunt, favored the handsome and dashing suitor, and as soon as she realized that he was in dead earnest, did everything in her power to assist him in his wooing.

He had money, high social standing, was versed in the ways of the world, and she flattered herself that it would be a great achievement to marry off her niece in such grand style.

Consequently she was much delighted when Con-

stance, with many blushes and considerable emotion, confidentially informed her that Mr. Southworth had offered himself to her.

She congratulated her most heartily, assuring her that she had made the match of the season and ought to consider herself a very fortunate girl.

"You will occupy a high position here in society," she said in a tone of great satisfaction, "and he is able to give you everything that you want."

"But, auntie, I always have had anything I wanted," Constance replied, as if that argument was no temptation. "You know that papa has always been most indulgent; but I do not think that is the most important question to be considered," she concluded, gravely.

"Well, you practical little puss, what, then, is the important question which perplexes you so?" Mrs. Williams inquired, with an amused smile.

"Whether I love him well enough to be his wife, and whether we are suited to each other," was the serious response.

"If appearances are any indication, I should say that you are very much in love with the gentleman," said her aunt. "You begin to flutter the moment you hear his step and the sound of his voice; you blush delightfully whenever you meet his glance or he speaks your name; you seem to be perfectly happy when you are with him, and you have

eagerly accepted his invitations and attentions in a way to encourage any suitor——"

"Oh, auntie! I hope you do not mean that I have been forward and immodest!" Constance exclaimed, in deep distress.

"Not in the least, you sensitive darling, or you would have been severely reproved long before this," returned the matron as she fondly kissed the blushing face; "but I do not want you to be too critical of your motives and feelings and spoil your whole life by refusing to accept the good the gods have provided for you. Seriously, Constance, I think you do love Mr. Southworth, do you not?"

"I—think so," the maiden answered as she dropped her hot face upon her aunt's shoulder. "I am very happy when I am with him, and he is so very fond of me that I cannot help liking him."

But the gentle girl was long in making up her mind.

She was pleased with her lover—it would have been strange if she had not been, for he was devoted to her—he had in fact carried her heart by storm, and she believed that she loved him and would be happy as his wife, and yet she hesitated about giving her final answer—to pledge herself beyond recall.

She found herself, too, yearning strangely for

the playmate of her youth at this time. She wondered if Laurence would approve of her choice—if he would see Noel with her eyes and feel that she had chosen wisely.

Does it seem strange that she did not awaken to the fact of Laurence's love for her while considering these important questions—that some intuition of the truth did not warn her to wait until his return, that she might compare the old friend with the new lover, and thus be enabled the better to sift the feelings of her own heart?

We must remember, however, that no word of love had ever been spoken between them; they had been playmates, friends; he had seemed almost like her own brother Reginald, only she had, if anything, preferred Laurence's society, Reginald being two or three years older and more sedate.

Then Noel Southworth's wooing had been conducted with all the ardor and impulse of a man who had never been in the habit of denying himself anything that he wanted. He had set his heart upon winning this sweet, bright girl who had none of the artificial ways of city-bred girls, and he left no stone unturned to accomplish his object.

All this, together with her aunt's delight over her conquest and her father's ready consent when asked to sanction the engagement, finally carried

the day, and Constance at length plighted her troth to Noel Southworth, believing that she loved him as she should love the man whom she was to marry.

CHAPTER II

THE LOST ENGAGEMENT RING

THE engagement was immediately announced. For a few days there was a flutter of excitement, mingled with something of jealousy, in circles polite; then, the fact being established, general interest was turned in another direction, and the newly-betrothed couple, since they were now "out of the market," were left to themselves and to mature their plans for the future according to their own sweet will.

This was in May, and Laurence was expected home by the last of the month.

Constance, therefore, did not write to him of her engagement, but concluded that she would wait until they met, when she would tell him of it.

He did not arrive, however, until about the first of June, and when his home greetings had been exchanged he hastened at once to find the playmate of his youth, the love of his maturer years.

He found her wandering alone through the woodland path toward the pretty brook and the rustic

seat where they had spent so many happy hours in days gone by.

But something in Laurence's manner impressed her strangely when they met.

There was a look in his eyes, a smile on his lips, a magnetism in the touch of his hands, which she had never observed before and which thrilled her with conflicting emotions.

Her face had lighted with exceeding joy upon meeting him, but after the first greetings were exchanged she grew suddenly shy of him, an unnatural constraint fell over her, and when it occurred to her to tell him of her engagement, her lips seemed to be unaccountably sealed.

Then she became unnaturally gay, and turning abruptly about in the path, insisted that he "must go home with her and meet papa and mamma."

He would have preferred to wait until later, but she would take no refusal and led him triumphantly back to the house.

The next morning, however, he came again and asked her to go with him to the old-time rendezvous.

She consented, but the same shyness stole over her as they went along the shaded path, and she found it impossible to converse with him as freely as she used to do.

Laurence at first wondered at it, then he told himself, with a tender smile upon his lips, that at

last his darling had become conscious of Cupid's power over her heart.

His own was light as air. She never had looked so lovely to him as now—she was like some fair, sweet flower, in her spotless dress of embroidered lawn—and an unusual sense of elation and happiness pervaded him.

No one had as yet lisped a word regarding Constance's engagement, to him, everybody supposing that he knew of it, and so he fondly imagined that when they retraced their steps she would be all his own—his promised wife.

The sun had never seemed to shine as brightly as on that fair June day. The birds had never seemed to sing so sweetly, nor the breezes to sweep so musically through the plumy branches of the dark rich pines above their heads.

The brook gleamed like a silver thread at their feet as they came to its brink and seemed, to the sanguine lover's ears an encouraging accompaniment to the joy beats of his hopeful heart.

They had stopped just beside the rustic seat, and Laurence, reaching down, clasped the pretty white hand that hung nearest him, and had given utterance to the words which opened our story.

He had been so sure of winning the dear girl whom he had so long believed destined for him that her rejection of his suit had come like a thun-

derbolt; her confession of love for another and the announcement of her engagement had, for the moment, paralyzed both heart and brain.

At first he could not realize it. He told himself that it must be some horrible dream—a dreadful nightmare; it could not be that Constance was lost to him forever; that in three weeks she would be the wife of another.

But as the truth gradually fastened itself upon his mind, the feeling of despair which swept over his soul was almost unendurable.

His sense of desolation could not have been more keen if she had dropped dead at his feet, and he had known that he was looking his last upon the face which was the fairest in the world to him.

He knew Noel Southworth by sight, although he had never conversed with him.

He was considerably older than himself, and had been in the senior class at Yale when Laurence entered as a freshman.

While he knew nothing against the man—while he knew that he stood well in the world and had been something of a favorite among his fellows—that he was fine looking in a certain way, well educated and rich, yet in his heart he had always been repelled by him.

He could not have analyzed this feeling nor given any good reason for it, but he did not believe that

he was the man whom Constance Alexander should marry—that he was capable of making her happy.

When, dazed, humiliated, and crushed by the blow he had received, he finally left her and retraced his steps over the pathway which, a few minutes previous, he had come feeling so assured and buoyant, he murmured, despairingly to himself:

"He is not worthy—he is not worthy of her; he can never meet the wants of her nature; he will never understand her."

Constance Alexander was an only daughter, the pride and idol of her parents and of her own brother, who was a young physician and had just begun to win a fine practice in New York City.

She had been very tenderly and daintily reared but she had always been thoughtful and mature beyond her years, possessing great refinement, depth and delicacy of feeling, and withal a happy, sunny temperament, which won her many friends wherever she went.

She had never known a sorrow up to the time our story opens—life for her had been almost an ideal existence; yet with all the indulgence of her parents, she had been a dutiful daughter, a conscientious student, for she was ambitious to make the most of herself, both for her own sake and to meet the expectations of those whose hopes were centred in

her. Thus she had grown to maturity as beautiful and symmetrical in character as she was in person.

She was of medium height, slender and graceful in figure, with a bearing that was affable and gracious.

She was very fair, with great, thoughtful, dark blue-gray eyes, which seemed to grow darker and deeper as you looked into them and talked with her, and yet they could dance merrily with the keenest appreciation of fun and frolic.

Her features were rather delicate and, though not remarkable for their regularity, attractive—at times exceedingly bewitching.

A wealth of dark-brown hair crowned her small, well-shaped head and shaded an intellectual brow.

Her mouth, although not after the approved rose-bud type, was very expressive, and when she smiled the thoughtful face became the merriest in the world, for the daintiest and most bewitching dimples played at hide and seek among the roses upon each cheek.

She could be grave and dignified, conversing fluently upon the various questions of the day, or she could be bright, and witty, and gay, the life and loadstone of a merry company.

Such was Constance Alexander when she made her *début* in New York City under the chaperonage

of her father's sister, Mrs. Homer Williams, and became the favorite of the season.

What wonder that the gay, polished man of the world—Noel Southworth—was charmed by her freshness, her grace and refinement, and set his heart upon winning her? What wonder, since no word of love had ever been whispered in her ears, that the ardent suitor, sparing no effort and effectually driving all others from the field by his devotion, should gain the prize he so coveted, especially when enthusiastically supported by Mrs. Williams and sanctioned by his sweetheart's father.

At any rate he did win her, and early in May she returned to her home his promised wife, perfectly happy in the prospect of her approaching marriage.

Her first regret—if regret it could be called, perhaps doubt as to the wisdom of binding herself without taking more time for considering so important a question would be the better way to state it—came to her on that bright June day when Laurence had told her of his lifelong love, and how all his hopes for the future had been centred in her.

She was very unhappy over his wretchedness, for the despair in his heart was plainly stamped upon his noble face when he turned from her and she felt that she had forever lost her friend—that the old relations between them could never be re-

established. And so she had thrown herself upon the ground, bowed her face upon the rustic seat where they had spent so many happy hours together, and wept with an abandonment of grief such as she had never shown before.

It was thus that her betrothed found her.

He came softly upon her as she sat there on that pine-carpeted spot, which was hallowed by a thousand tender memories, and an expression of astonishment and dismay shot over his handsome face at the sight of her wild grief.

"Constance—my own love! what does this mean?" he exclaimed in tones of tenderest solicitude.

The weeping girl sprang to her feet, a low cry of surprise escaping her as she turned her tear-stained face upon her lover.

He came to her side, took her into his arms, and laid her face upon his breast.

"What has happened to grieve you so, my darling?" he questioned, as he pressed his lips to her soft brown hair.

But his tone of sympathy, instead of calming her, only served to lift the floodgates higher, and she burst into weeping afresh, floods of tears streaming over her flushed cheeks.

Her betrothed drew her down upon the rustic bench, and with one arm still infolding her allowed

her grief to have its way unchecked until it was spent.

He wisely refrained from questioning her, nor did he speak again until her tears ceased to flow and she was able to control the deep sobs which had shaken her slight frame like a reed.

At last he gently wiped the drops from her cheeks with his own daintily perfumed handkerchief, then lifting the lovely face, he gazed tenderly into the dewy eyes.

"Now, my Constance, you must tell me what has caused this burst of sorrow," he said, with gentle fondness. "I have never seen a tear flow from these dear eyes before, and such overpowering grief appalls me."

The unhappy girl flushed crimson.

She felt a natural delicacy about revealing the secret of Laurence's hopeless love for her, and had she had time to regain her composure before meeting her lover, she never would have disclosed it to him or any one—it would have remained secretly locked within her own heart forever.

But since Noel had surprised her weeping so wildly, she knew that she must give him some explanation.

She was truthfulness itself; she could not dissemble; and reasoning that she should have no secrets from her future husband, she told him just

what had occurred, and how astonished and grieved she had been over the unexpected revelation.

Her lover listened with averted eyes and a hardening of the lines about his handsome mouth.

It is not pleasant for one man to learn that another loves his promised wife, or to be told that the cause of such excessive grief as he had just witnessed was sympathy and regret for his rival, and instantaneously Noel Southworth experienced a feeling of jealousy and dislike toward Laurence Everet.

He was very thankful that the wedding had been set for so early a day, and that he would soon be able to bear his betrothed away from the sight of her old friend's woeful face and from the danger of such interviews as the recent one.

Still, the fact that Constance had been so frank, so free to tell him the truth, disarmed him and prevented him from feeling any great degree of uneasiness as far as she was concerned.

Yet with a lover's fondness, he wanted the assurance from her own lips that he had nothing to fear from this revelation of the affection of her lifelong friend.

He folded her close in his arms, and anxiously searching the beautiful face upon his breast, he questioned, earnestly:

"But you do not love him, Constance? The

knowledge of his love for you has not robbed me, in any degree, of the affection of your heart? I could not bear that, my darling."

Did he imagine it or did she hesitate an instant before replying?

"No, Noel, I do not love you any the less," she gravely said as she frankly lifted her clear eyes to his.

"And are you sure, dear, that his confession has not made you regret in the least your promise to be my wife?"

"Why should it, dear?" she asked, with some surprise, though a look of pain, as she remembered Laurence's despairing face, leaped into her eyes. "I gave myself to you freely—unreservedly," she added after a moment. "I have not swerved for an instant from my allegiance to you. Oh, Noel! do not distrust me," she concluded, with a pathetic quiver of her lips.

"I do not, love," he gravely responded, "but naturally I am somewhat troubled to find you grieving so wildly over Everet's avowal of love for you."

"I could not help it," she said, simply.

"Has he ever hinted at it before?"

"Never in the way he did to-day."

"I trust he never will trespass in like manner again," was the rather cold response.

"Oh, Noel! he will not. You do not know

Laurence; he is nobility itself!" Constance cried in warm defense of her friend.

"He surely has a stanch champion in the woman who has so recently rejected his suit," her lover remarked, with a slight accent of sarcasm.

"Noel," Constance cried, lifting her head from its resting place and looking him earnestly in the eye, "Laurence and I have known each other ever since we were little children; he has been like a kind and thoughtful brother to me, and I have loved him as such. But I never dreamed that he cared for me as—in the way that you care. I never thought of such a thing as his asking me to become his wife, and you must not be suspicious of me if you wish me to be happy with you."

"I am not suspicious of you, my darling," Noel asserted, fondly, as he attempted to draw her again into his embrace.

But she gently repelled him.

"I want to tell you all now," she said. "I want to tell you frankly that it is only natural that I should grieve when he told me that his life would be ruined by his disappointment. I cannot bear to see any one suffer, much less one for whom I have always entertained so deep a regard. Oh! I wish he had never told me of this," she concluded, with a long-drawn sigh.

Noel Southworth wished so, too, most heartily, but he desired to chase the clouds from her brow.

"He will get over it, dear, in time," he remarked, reassuringly; "he will meet some fine girl by and by whom he will marry and who will make him happy. Now, do not grieve any more over the matter, for I cannot bear to have this dear face overcast by a single care or thought of trouble," and he kissed her fondly as he spoke.

He took her hand and arose to return to the house, when he suddenly started and the red blood mounted to his forehead.

"Constance, where is your ring?" he asked, pointing to the finger on which he had placed it.

She glanced down at her hand—the finger was bare!

"Noel!" she cried, aghast, "I do not know. It was there when I came out. Oh! have I lost it? It was a little loose, you know."

"Yes, and I ordered a guard for it last week—it should have been here before this," he moodily responded.

"What can have become of it!" Constance said, in great distress, and she began to hunt about among the pine needles at her feet.

"It is a very bad omen to lose an engagement ring," Noel remarked, with a rueful face, while

he dropped upon his knees and also began to search for it.

Constance shivered slightly.

"We must find it," she said, resolutely.

They looked for more than an hour, though Noel was on the point two or three times of giving it up, saying that he would give her another one.

"No, I must have this one," the resolute girl returned, and she absolutely refused to go home without it.

They found it as last, lying close to—almost under—one of the legs of the rustic seat.

Constance gave a cry of joy as she espied it, and slipping it upon her finger, she said, earnestly:

"You may be very sure, Noel, I will never lose it again."

"No, you shall have a guard to-morrow," he answered, but the circumstance had annoyed him exceedingly, and a feeling of uneasiness followed him during the remainder of the day.

Although he was not superstitious regarding signs, there was, nevertheless, a presentiment of evil aroused in his mind, notwithstanding that the ring had been found.

CHAPTER III

TWO FIGURES UPON THE LAWN

As CONSTANCE and her lover returned to the house she tried to throw off her sadness, for she saw that it troubled Noel; but she could not derive much consolation from his assurance that Laurence would "get over" his disappointment and find some "fine girl" to comfort him for his loss of her.

A cloud hung over her spirits all day, but the subject was not referred to again, for a far more important matter—to Noel Southworth at least—occupied their attention.

The groom elect had come from the city a few days previously to hasten his marriage, for some friends of his were going to sail for Europe the last of the month, and were very anxious that he and his bride should join their party.

The wedding had originally been set for the 1st of September, but it was now his wish that it should occur on the 25th of the current month, in order to allow them to sail on the 28th with the party referred to.

Constance had demurred to this arrangement at first, but Noel was persistent, and after submitting the matter to Mr. and Mrs. Alexander and obtaining their sanction to the arrangement, she finally yielded the point, whereupon invitations were immediately issued for the 25th.

During the hurry and excitement which followed this change of programme Constance did not have much time to brood over her recent interview with Laurence.

She did not once see him in the interval between that day and her marriage, for he had been too sorely wounded and unnerved to meet her with any degree of composure, and Constance did not go out much, except now and then for a drive with her *fiancé*.

Callers and friends were constantly coming and going and had to be entertained. Boxes and parcels arrived daily, each containing some new creation for the bridal outfit, which must be examined and tried on. Presents came pouring in from every quarter, and these had to be unpacked, admired, and acknowledged, so, with all these duties to demand her attention, she was too busy to think of much else, much less to grieve, had she been so inclined.

She was lively and happy—at least she appeared so—and no one, save her lover, imagined that any-

thing of an unpleasant nature had occurred to disturb her.

Everybody about her was gay—the bridesmaids were all animated with delight in anticipation of the important event for which they were preparing; Noel was all smiles and devotion, and seemed so supremely happy that the fair bride elect could not fail to participate in the prevailing spirit.

Thus the days flew by, and the evening before the wedding arrived.

The ceremony had been set for twelve o'clock on the next day, and at an early hour Mrs. Alexander insisted that Constance should bid their friends and guests good-night and retire, so that she might be fresh and fair for the most important event of her life.

She accompanied her to her room and assisted her in her perparations for the night, feeling strangely unnerved in view of the fact that to-morrow Constance would no longer belong exclusively to her, as heretofore.

As she was about to leave her she folded her tenderly in her arms and kissed her fondly upon both cheeks and lips.

"My dear one," she murmured, with a suspicious tremble in her tones, "this is your last night in your home as ours alone, but I can willingly give you up, knowing that you are happy. You are going

to be the wife of a kind, good man, whom you both love and respect—is it not so, Constance?"

"Yes, mamma," the young girl responded, a thoughtful look superseding the merry expression which had illumined her face after the gay good-nights which she had exchanged with her friends below.

"You are perfectly happy, Constance?" wistfully queried the fond mother, whose heart was very tender on the eve of this trying separation.

Constance turned and threw her arms about her mother's neck and laid her cheek against hers.

"I should be very ungrateful and unappreciative if I were not," she said, affectionately, "for I am sure no girl ever had a more devoted lover or kinder friends than I have. Bless you, mother, dear; my only regret is that I cannot take you all with me to-morrow," and tears gathered in her eyes over the thought of parting.

"There, my darling, we must not talk any more upon such dangerous topics," said Mrs. Alexander, trying to speak lightly. "There must be no tears to dim these dear eyes—there must not be even a shadow in them to-morrow. You will soon return to us—at least to your own delightful home in New York, and we shall see each other very often. My dear, I feel that a very bright future is before you. Now good-night, love; try to get all the sleep you

can, for I want no pale cheeks nor heavy eyes to-morrow."

She tenderly smoothed the silken and lace cover-lid over the graceful form upon the bed, lingering over the act with loving hands; put the various toilet articles upon the dressing-case in order for use in the morning, turned out the lights, then, bending once more over the lovely face upon the pillow, touched it lightly with her lips and stole softly out of the room.

But for some reason sleep did not come readily to Constance that night. She was strangely wakeful and restless, but she forced herself to lie quietly in bed until the sound of voices and laughter ceased below, and she knew the guests had all retired.

Then, softly stealing from her couch, she threw on a warm flannel wrapper, parted the silken draperies at an open window, and sitting beside it, looked out upon the wide sweep of lawn beneath her.

The night was perfect.

The moon, in its first quarter, hung low in the western sky, giving just light enough to distinguish objects that were not too distant.

The stars glittered brilliantly in the dusky vault above; a delicious breeze stole in at the window and lightly swayed the soft draperies that fell around the slender form sitting there, touching her

with its refreshing coolness, while the perfume of many flowers was wafted to her upon its wings.

Many grave, strange thoughts came to Constance as she folded her arms upon the window-sill and leaned forth to inhale the delicious air—thoughts regarding the great change about to come to her and the many duties awaiting her in the future—of the friends she was about to leave and the solemn vows she would take upon herself to-morrow.

Her glances wandered wistfully to a stately mansion just distinguishable beyond the line of beautiful maples which separated her father's estate from that of Mr. Everet, and a feeling of sadness oppressed her as she thought of him who had hitherto been her choicest friend, but who, of late, had avoided her and given no sign of interest or sympathy with her regarding the new relations she was about to assume.

Mr. and Mrs. Everet had sent their most hearty congratulations in response to the cards inviting them to her marriage, together with an elegant wedding gift; but from Laurence there had come no word—no token. She knew that he was still at home, for she had heard it from various sources, though she had not once seen him since his avowal.

He had told her that his life would be ruined in losing her, but he was thoroughly noble, and she did not believe that he would allow himself to

treasure ill will against her for what had been no fault of hers.

She wondered if he would be present at her wedding to-morrow.

Cards had been sent to him as a matter of course, and she had addressed them with her own hands, although she had shrunk from the act, knowing that the sight of them would be but another stab to his already sorely wounded heart. But she could not neglect the form without explaining her reasons, and this she could not do to any one.

She was thinking of all this as she sat there in the dim moonlight, her gaze fixed absently upon the lawn—a feeling of sadness stealing over her, when suddenly a moving object under the shadow of the line of maples attracted her attention.

She leaned farther forward for a better view, and saw that it was the figure of a man.

Something told her that it was Laurence himself, and with bated breath and paling cheek she continued to watch him with increasing interest.

Slowly the figure came out from beneath the shadows and traversed the lawn, and finally stopped about midway and just opposite the window where Constance was sitting.

He stood there for a few moments, absolutely motionless, as if gazing at the very spot where she sat; but she knew that he could not see her, for the

draperies falling about her concealed her and there was no light in the room.

All at once he threw out his arms toward her with a wildly appealing gesture, and Constance was sure that she caught the sound of a despairing groan.

Then his attitude changed; the extended hands were drawn back with a convulsive movement and beaten against his breast as if he was in mortal agony; then he turned and staggered back toward the heavy shadows of the maples and so disappeared from her sight.

The fair bride elect was deeply shocked—smitten to her very soul by this evidence of his wretchedness.

"Oh, Laurie! Laurie!" she cried in a pained, remorseful tone, "I never dreamed that you loved me like this! I wish you had never told me. I cannot bear that your life should be ruined because of me," and dropping her face upon her folded arms, she burst into a torrent of tears which would surely have made her mother fear dim, heavy eyes and faded cheeks could she have been there to witness them.

She was very much depressed by what she had seen; a heavy weight lay upon her heart, and all at once she experienced a strange shrinking from the untried duties which the coming day would bring her. But one, however sad, cannot weep forever, and after a time her tears ceased to flow, her sobs

grew less frequent, and finally, feeling that she ought to be sleeping, she lifted her head and turned her eyes for one last look upon the spot where, a few moments previous, she had seen Laurence standing.

Imagine her astonishment when, in the very place, she saw, outlined against the sky, the tall, slender figure of—a woman!

She was standing as motionless as a statue, while by the faint light of the moon Constance could just discern a face which seemed ghastly as marble, and a pair of fair white hands clasped upon her bosom.

"What can it mean? Who can she be?" she breathed, a slight shiver running over her frame. "I am sure it was Laurie whom I saw standing there a few moments ago—I know his figure, and I am confident that I was not mistaken. At all events, that other figure was that of a man and this a woman. It cannot be possible that I fell asleep and am dreaming," she continued, rubbing her hands together to make sure that she was awake. "No, for there the figure still stands like some dusky medallion chiseled out of the sky. What can it mean? It almost seems like an omen of some kind—whether for good or ill I cannot tell," she concluded, beginning to tremble with nervous excitement.

Then, while she still looked, the figure turned

and walked away in the same direction that Laurence had taken, her dark garments sweeping out behind her and fluttering in the breeze.

A sense of fear and impending evil oppressed the wondering girl as she crept away to bed, but not to sleep, for with throbbing temples and frightened heart pulsations she lay far into the small hours of the morning, trying to solve the mystery of the appearance of the second figure upon the lawn.

Yes, the first figure which Constance had seen was no other than Laurence himself.

He had passed the most wretched three weeks of his life since his interview with the girl whom he so madly loved.

She had told him that she was to be married just three weeks from that day; but though the news had almost crushed him, hope had not died within him.

Strange as it may seem, a vague belief that something would yet occur to prevent the marriage and Constance would yet be his took possession of him.

"She belonged by right to him," he told himself; "for had he not loved her and lived only for her all his life?"

He had called her "little wife" a thousand times, and she had laughingly indulged him in the use of the term until he had grown to feel that she must become so, eventually, in reality.

But upon receiving her wedding cards, addressed in her own hand, this insane hope had been extinguished, and then he was reduced to the most abject despair.

But he strove to keep his trouble to himself—he never mentioned to any one that he was suffering mentally or complained that he was ill in body.

But his friends saw that he was rapidly losing flesh and color, and knew that something was very wrong.

Becoming alarmed lest he should break down, his mother begged him to see their physician; but this Laurence decidedly refused to do, for he feared that the man would suspect his secret; then he buried himself in his own room and would see no one save the members of the family, and here he tried to fight out alone the battle which threatened to wreck both health and reason.

Thus the days dragged wearily by until the evening of the 24th arrived.

All day long Laurence had remained within doors, lying half stupid upon his bed, too weak and spent to battle longer against the inevitable.

But as daylight waned and darkness began to envelope the earth he grew very restless. He was weary of lying—the room seemed hot and close, and, rising, he slipped quietly out of the house and

involuntarily turned his steps toward the home of her who continually filled his mind and heart.

He had no thought of seeing her or any one—he did not desire to be seen nor did he imagine he would be; for the hour was late and the lights had all been extinguished in the Alexander mansion. The force of his misery simply drove him hither without any plan or reason on his part.

He wandered slowly along beneath the shadow of the trees, then crossed the lawn to a spot where he could see a window which had been a favorite seat with Constance, and there he had stood with his eyes fastened on it, but never suspecting that any one was observing him, until, unable longer to endure the tender memories which came thronging upon him, he threw out his arms as if he would gather the object of his love to his heart; then, realizing the folly of his act, he wildly beat upon his breast and staggered from the spot, as we have already described.

He would not go home—it seemed as if he would stifle in the house, so he turned his steps toward the old familiar path leading to the brook, where, throwing himself upon the rustic seat, he once more yielded himself to the sorrow that was consuming him.

"Oh! if I had but told her before I went abroad, I might have won her," he groaned, "but I was so

sure that she loved me, and so, by my procrastination, I have lost her. Lost—lost: what a word it is—like an inextinguishable brand of fire, burning deeper and deeper into my brain. Will it ever become so seared and calloused—so benumbed that I shall feel no pain?"

He lost himself in troubled musings for a few moments, and then resumed; it seemed to be a relief to him to give verbal expression to his feelings:

"To-morrow will be the 25th! Can I bear it and live? Shall I go to witness the sacrifice? Never! never! never!" he cried vehemently. "And yet it almost seems as if some evil spirit will drive me there in spite of myself. Oh! Noel Southworth, while I know nothing against you, there is yet something within me that tells me you are not worthy of the pure and priceless gem that you have won; there are certain lines of selfishness and weakness written on your face which do not promise well for you if temptation and adversity should overtake you and—— Ah! what is this?"

This startled exclamation was forced from him by the touch of an icy hand suddenly laid upon his as it rested upon the arm of the rustic seat, and looking up, Laurence Everet saw a woman's figure bending over him.

"Who are you?" he demanded, trying to peer into her face.

"Who are you who thus sit in judgment upon Noel Southworth's character?" sternly questioned a hollow voice, which sent a chill quivering through his veins.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNEXPECTED WEDDING GUEST

LAURENCE sprung to his feet, a thrill of repulsion quivering through his nerves at that clammy touch.

"Who are you?" he demanded again of the figure who had intruded upon his seclusion.

"A broken-hearted woman who does not care whether she lives or dies," was the despairing response in a voice rendered sharp by suffering.

"What do you mean?" and Laurence bent forward, trying to get a view of her face. "What has brought you here at this hour of the night?"

"A spirit of unrest and misery, and in my wandering I came here upon you unawares. It is said in the village that there is to be a grand wedding tomorrow. Is it true that Miss Alexander is to be married?" the woman returned in a low, musical voice.

"Yes," said Laurence, briefly, but somewhat sharply.

"To whom?"

"To a gentleman from New York City—Mr. Noel Southworth."

There came a quick gasp from the lips of the woman at this.

"It is said that she—Miss Alexander—is very beautiful," she breathed in a scarcely audible tone.

"Yes—very beautiful."

"Is—is she worthy of the man whom she will marry?"

"Worthy!" Laurence repeated, sharply; then added in a tender tone: "She is an angel—nay, better than that, she is a pure and noble woman, and worthy the grandest man that lives."

"Aha!" was the somewhat scornful retort, "you speak in high praise of the fair bride elect. You should know her well to laud her thus."

Laurence had to clench his hands fiercely in the effort to control the bitter pain which seemed to tear his heart asunder as his wounds were thus opened afresh.

But after a moment he answered in a repressed tone.

"I have known her all my life."

"Ah! Then tell me—does she love him?" and his companion bent nearer to him, waiting his reply in breathless suspense.

It was a terrible ordeal to be questioned thus regarding the woman whom he idolized and whom

he had lost. But pride restrained him from making any sign which would betray his agony to an utter stranger.

"Constance Alexander is truth and honor itself; she could not marry any man without believing that she loved him," he returned, in a noble defense of her character, but feeling as if he were turning to stone in giving utterance to the loyal tribute.

"And he?" demanded the woman in a voice so strained and unnatural that it did not seem like a human voice at all, but more like the wail of some hunted animal that had been wounded unto death.

"He—Mr. Southworth is entirely devoted to her," Laurence forced himself to say, determined that no word of his should cast a doubt upon the future happiness of her whom he loved better than life.

Then, unable longer to bear the agony of this inquisition, he cried:

"But, madam, who are you, and why do you, an entire stranger, question me thus regarding the private affairs of people who are nothing to you?"

"Nothing to me!" repeated his companion in a voice choked with excessive emotion. "Great Heaven! he says they are nothing to me! And who am I? The most wretched creature who walks the earth. Why do I question you, an utter stranger? Because I am desperate—so desperate that I care

not from whom I seek to learn the truth regarding the treachery of one who has ruined my life and driven me to the verge of despair. Let Noel Southworth beware—let the fair-faced woman who has won him beware!"

With a moan of anguish the strange being turned abruptly and darted away, vanishing in the gloom as suddenly as she had come, and leaving Laurence Everet both startled and amazed at her wild words.

"Who can the wretched creature be!" he muttered as he bent to listen to her retreating footsteps. "Is she some girl whom Noel Southworth has wronged?" he muttered, sternly. "It certainly looks like it! Oh! if I but knew the truth—if I could prove that he is unworthy of Constance, I would brave everything to save her, even at this late hour. After all that I have suffered in giving her up, it would be enduring my agony twice over if she should be unhappy in her future life. I wish I knew where to find this woman. I would go to her and force her to tell me the truth."

He knew, however, that it would be useless to follow her, for he could not tell what direction she had taken.

It was not probable that he would ever meet her again, and if he did it was doubtful whether he would be able to recognize her.

She had seemed to be very graceful in all her movements; the sound of her voice—rich sweet, and smooth—indicated a person of culture; her language had been refined and well chosen.

It had been a strange, weird experience, and troubled him deeply, but his own grief over the coming events of the morrow outweighed every other emotion, and he was soon lost to all else.

He spent most of the night in that spot hallowed by so many tender associations of the past, and the gray dawn was just beginning to break in the east when he finally struggled to his feet and turned his face homeward. Here in the seclusion of his own room he tried to face the fact that in a few hours Constance would be lost to him forever.

* * * * * * * *

Constance Alexander's wedding day proved to be one of unclouded beauty, and if the old adage, "Blessed is the bride the sun shines on," were only an infallible one, she was surely destined to enjoy an ideal future, free from clouds or shadows of any kind.

The pretty town of —— was all alert on this fair morning, for the lovely girl had ever been a favorite in the community, and everybody vied with one another in doing honor to her on this occasion.

Invitations to the ceremony in the church had been sent far and near, and at an early hour crowds

began to pour into the spacious edifice, eager to witness this, the most important event their quiet village had known for years.

Friendly hands had turned the church into a bower of floral loveliness—a most fitting place for so fair a bride to plight her vows. Evergreens, palms and ferns, together with a profusion of rare flowers, had been tastefully arranged about the altar. The great chandeliers and side lamps had been draped with trailing vines and roses, while upon every pew down the central aisle there was fastened an artistic bouquet tied with gleaming ribbons.

Just midway of this aisle there were gates, fashioned of evergreens and roses, and surmounted by an arch bearing the initials "S." and "A."

Surely if beauty and fragrance were omens, the married life of the young couple was to be literally a pathway strewn with roses.

Before twelve o'clock the great church was crowded to overflowing—there was not even standing room save in the central aisle before the altar.

The last stroke of the clock in the steeple had not ceased to reverberate when the main doors were thrown open and two lovely children, in spotless white, passed down the aisle to the floral gates, which they threw wide open and held thus for those who should come after them to pass through.

Then, with stately tread, followed the four

ushers, and close upon these came the four bridemaids in pale pink, blue, lavender and yellow crêpe de chine.

The maid of honor, in cream white, was followed by the bride, leaning upon the arm of her noble-looking father—a man a little past the prime of life, but one whom one needed to see but once to know that he was one of nature's noblemen. But who can do justice to the beautiful bride, in her shimmering robes of dead white satin, crowned with a dainty wreath of lilies-of-the-valley, from which the long tulle veil fell in fleecy clouds around her graceful form, softening while it did not conceal her beauty.

Her glossy brown hair was arranged simply, as she was accustomed to wear it; her face, while it wore a grave, earnest expression, was delicately tinted like the petals of a blush rose before it has fully opened to the sun; her eyes were downcast, and her whole manner and bearing indicated that she fully realized, and was absorbed in contemplating the solemnity of the great step she was about to take.

Of course, every eye was upon her—every one in that vast audience watched her with breathless interest, with a kind of awed fascination, for they had never seen her so lovely as she was at that mo-

ment; she seemed as pure as the spotless bridal roses which she carried in her white-gloved hands.

As she passed between the gates of evergreen toward the new life that awaited her beyond, there was no one who knew her in that great company but breathed a wish that they might be symbolic of her future.

Mr. Southworth, accompanied by his best man, approaching from a side entrance, met the party at the altar, where the benign, gray-haired pastor, who had known the gentle maiden ever since her birth, who, indeed, had pronounced the marriage benediction upon her father and mother, impressively went through the ceremony which made the young couple one while life should last.

He seemed strangely affected during the service, and when he came to that solemn charge, "If any present know aught why these two should not be united in the holy bonds of matrimony, let him now speak or forever hold his peace," he had paused longer, it seemed to his waiting congregation, than he had ever done before—so long, in fact, that the father of the bride regarded him with surprise and Noel Southworth turned as white as the spotless dress of his bride; then suddenly lifting his glance to the clergyman's face, he had broken the spell, the service proceeded without interruption, and a

feeling blessing was pronounced upon the happy pair.

It was over. Constance Alexander was the wife of Noel Southworth, and as the first triumphant strains of the wedding march arose among the arches of the stately church, the husband and wife turned from the altar and retraced their steps through the central aisle toward the vestibule.

They had almost reached the door when, suddenly, from among the gayly dressed company on the right, there arose the figure of a woman, who leaned forward, apparently oblivious of the astonished faces about her, as if to obtain a better view of the bride and groom as they passed out.

She was tall and slender, very graceful and beautiful in form, with a dark, delicate face of rare refinement and beauty.

Great brown eyes, burning now with a strange, intense fire, looked out from beneath finely-penciled brows, while waves of rich dark-brown hair fell away from a forehead somewhat low, but broad and intelligent.

Her nose was classic, with delicately chiseled nostrils, her mouth a vivid scarlet and very beautiful, although just now firmly compressed in a tense line of pain.

Her complexion was pure as alabaster and almost as colorless, and to those sitting near her, watching

her standing there so motionless, her whole soul apparently concentrated in that gaze upon the newly-wedded pair, she seemed more like some fair spirit from another sphere than like a happy human guest bidden to a gay wedding.

She was tastefully and elegantly clad in a soft pearl-gray silk, elaborately trimmed; a dainty hat to match the dress and garnished with clusters of trailing arbutus crowned her shapely head, and richly embroidered pearl-gray gloves incased her small hands, in which she carried an exquisitely carved fan of point lace.

Pale pink coral ornaments of foreign design were in her small ears, and fastened the rare lace that encircled her pure white neck.

Her strange and sudden act of rising just as she did attracted the attention of the groom as he drew near the door, his handsome face beaming with pride and joy over the consummation of his hopes.

A look of horror leaped into his eyes as he encountered those orbs of living fire which were fixed so steadfastly upon him; the glad smile died upon his lips, every atom of color faded from his cheeks, and a mighty shock went quivering through him from head to foot.

For an instant his step faltered, and it almost seemed as if he was going to stop; then, by a powerful effort, he withdrew his gaze from the face of

that peerlessly beautiful woman and passed out of the church.

The stranger then sunk back into her seat, unmindful of the wondering looks upon the faces around her, and did not once raise her eyes nor move until the throng had passed out of the building.

The fair bride, absorbed in her own solemn thoughts, and with her eyes downcast, had observed nothing of this strange scene; but she felt the sudden thrill and inward start which had agitated her husband, and the moment they were alone in their carriage she turned to look into his face, and could not fail to notice his extreme pallor.

"What is it, Noel?" she asked in a tone of alarm. "Why did you start so just as we were leaving the church? Why are you so pale? Are you ill?"

A brilliant smile dispelled the gloom which had settled over the young husband's face.

The voice of his bride seemed to unlock the uncanny spell that had enthralled him ever since he had met the fiery gleam of those wondrous brown eyes in the church.

"No, my darling, not ill," he answered, as he folded her close in his embrace and pressed a fervent kiss upon her lips. "I am well, and the happiest man in the world at this moment."

"But you are so pale," Constance returned, study-

ing his face, which had not regained its usual color even yet. "And you did give a fearful start—I felt it with my hand upon your arm. What caused it, Noel?"

He wished she had not been so observant. He wished she would not be so persistent.

What was he to tell her? How should he explain it?

A slight shade of annoyance clouded his eyes for an instant. Then he said, as he lightly touched her lips again:

"Do not be troubled, love; there is nothing serious the matter. The excitement of the day has taken hold of me a little, perhaps; then, this morning, while assisting John to strap the trunks, I strained my side a trifle, and a pain seized me just as we were coming out of the church."

"Oh, I hope you have not injured yourself!" Constance exclaimed as she searched his face anxiously.

"No, dear, it is nothing; I shall soon be well of it. Think no more about it, for we must not allow anything to mar this red-letter day. You are all my own now, my love—my wife! I hope, darling, that you may never know a sorrow; at any rate, it shall be my care to shield you in every possible way from the ills of life."

And so, with a secret in his heart and a lie on

his lips, Noel Southworth turned from the altar with the pure, true and trusting woman whom he had won, and who believed him to be all that her fond fancy had painted him.

Would he shield her from every care? Would he interpose himself between her and the ills of life, bravely bearing the brunt and burden, that no sorrow need touch her?

When Time shall turn the pages of his book a little farther on the sequel will show.

CHAPTER V

A STARTLING MEETING

MANY people wondered who the beautiful stranger could be who had been guilty of such a breach of etiquette as to rise from her seat and stand gazing so intently at the newly-wedded couple as they were passing out of the church.

She was a stranger in the village—no one had ever seen her before, but she was evidently a person occupying a high position, if she could be judged by her beauty, refinement, and elegant apparel.

Some relative of Mr. Southworth, probably, some cousin or distant connection, who had perhaps been overfond of him, and, under the excitement of the moment, had forgotten herself, were among the possible explanations that suggested themselves to the curious who were sitting near her. Yet if such had been the case, why had she not been seated nearer the altar with the other friends of the family?

But matters of more importance than speculating upon the actions of this fair unknown claimed the

attention of the crowd just then, and it surged out unmindful of her future movements.

She sat quietly in her seat until almost every one had gone, her head slightly bent, her eyes downcast and apparently studying the pattern of the beautiful fan which lay open upon her lap.

At last she arose and glided with unsteady steps from the place, and going to the door of the church, looked out as if in search of some one. A short distance from the circular avenue leading up to it there stood a plain but elegant carriage drawn by a pair of beautiful black horses, while a dignified coachman sat upon the box.

The stranger quietly signaled to him, whereupon he immediately drove to the church door, alighted from his seat, and assisted the lady to enter the vehicle; then, springing to his box once more, he gathered up the reins and drove rapidly from the village, taking the road which led to another town some six or eight miles distant.

The sexton alone had watched both the coming and going of this mysterious person.

She had arrived early and had quietly chosen her own seat at the head of one of the pews in the back of the church on the centre aisle. He had not paid much attention to her except to feel a little surprised that she should choose so remote a position, when she might have had one command-

ing a much better view of the altar and bridal party.

But now, when she drove away in the same quiet fashion and without attending the reception, as he had supposed she would, having come in such style, he looked after her, wondering if she had any right to be there at all.

As the carriage finally passed from sight, however, he turned back into the church to attend to his various duties there, when his attention was attracted to a dark object in one of the side back pews, leaning against a pillar supporting the gallery.

He hastened forward to ascertain what it was, and found the unconscious form of Laurence Everet, half sitting, half crouching there.

The young man, as we know, had no intention of attending the wedding, to behold the girl whom he worshiped given to another.

But as the hour set for the ceremony drew near his father and mother appeared to take it for granted that he was going, arguing that even if he was not well, it would be hardly courteous to their lifelong neighbors to slight their invitation.

Too proud to confess his weakness, he told himself, in a fit of desperation, that he might as well "see the play played out," and, acting upon this impulse, he dressed himself at the last moment,

hastened to the church, and glided into one of the back pews as the bridal party entered.

There he sat throughout the ceremony, gazing with stolid, colorless face upon the scene which was the last blow to his happiness, the climax to his misery.

He was so quiet and self-constrained, however, that no one observed him particularly, for, of course, the attention of everybody was centred in that interesting group gathered around the altar.

But the agony which he was obliged thus to restrain, together with the sufferings of the last three weeks, the sleepless nights, and the exposure of the previous night, when he had taken a heavy cold, proved to be too much of a tax upon his overstrained nerves and system.

He watched, with a lingering, despairing look, the bride, as she passed down the aisle leaning upon her husband's arm—watched her until she seemed to be gradually enveloped in an impenetrable haze and the joyous strains of the wedding march grew distant and indistinct. When at last the doors closed behind her, he sunk wearily back against a pillar, and knew nothing more for many long weeks.

And thus the sexton found him.

"Why! bless my stars, if it isn't young Mr. Everet!" he exclaimed in great astonishment and alarm. "Whatever can be the matter with him?

He has been looking poorly since he returned from foreign parts."

He raised the form of the unconscious young man, who had nearly slipped from his seat, then hastened out of the church to obtain assistance in removing him to his home.

A carriage was soon at the door, and Laurence was ere long laid upon the bed in his own room, where he lay, nigh unto death with brain fever, for almost two months.

Strange though it may seem, even in his wildest delirium he did not betray the secret which had so nearly consumed his life; but babbled instead of the events of his childhood, of his school days, when he was ambitious to stand well in his classes and let no others outrun him in the race; of his pleasure, when he, with Constance and Reginald Alexander, had played by the brook beneath the pines; while ragarding more recent events he referred only to his travels in other lands.

His life was despaired of—his physician gave but very little hope of his recovery; but he fought the disease as persistently and tirelessly as if Laurence had been his own son, and was finally rewarded for his struggle. The youth of his patient, his strong frame and pure blood, his irreproachable habits, were all in his favor, and he gradually awoke to new life and consciousness, although for long weeks

after his delirium left him he lay weak and helpless as a little child.

Constance fortunately knew nothing of this, for immediately after the brilliant reception at her home she and her husband left for New York, where they were to sail in a day or two for Europe.

Mr. and Mrs. Alexander accompanied them to the city, and after seeing them off upon their voyage started themselves upon a long trip to the Pacific coast and Alaska, to be gone for the remainder of the summer, leaving their home in the care of a housekeeper and their servants.

Six months elapsed before any of them returned, and before this Laurence had so far recovered as to be able to travel himself, when his physician recommended a sea voyage, to be followed by a winter in a warmer climate.

Consequently, with his parents he sailed for Spain just one month previous to the arrival of the bridal party in New York on their return from abroad.

Constance had enjoyed her season of travel exceedingly. Their party had been an exceptionally pleasant one; her husband had been tireless in his devotion, lavishing money and gifts upon her with an unsparing hand. Delighted with her experiences, improved and cultured by a more extended knowledge of the world, she had never seemed more charming than upon her return to her native land.

Mr. Southworth took a house in Madison Avenue, furnished it most luxuriously, and thus life appeared to have a most promising outlook for the future for the young couple.

With ample means at her command, a beautiful home and assured position in society, and a devoted husband, it is not strange that the young wife believed herself to be supremely happy, and gave only a passing regret now and then to the playmate of her youth, whose hopes had been so prematurely blighted by her rejection of his suit.

She had learned since her return that Laurence had been very ill and was now abroad for his health; but she did not associate his sickness with her marriage, and in the midst of her many pleasures and social duties she did not give much thought to the fact, otherwise than to feel sincerely glad that he was now far on the road toward recovery.

One evening she and her husband were invited to a brilliant reception given by a leader in society, in honor of a niece from Boston who was spending the winter with her.

Constance was very lovely in a "creation" from Worth's—a dainty light-blue crêpe de chine embroidered with tiny pearls—and her husband whispered in her ear just as they were entering the crowded drawing-room that she was the fairest woman in the house.

She laughed gaily at the compliment and called him a "foolish flatterer," but she bloomed the fairer as they went forward to be presented to their hostess and her lovely niece.

After that they were kept busy for an hour exchanging questions with their numerous acquaintances, and then Miss Rainford—the young lady for whom the reception had been given—came to Constance, toward whom she had been greatly attracted, and after conversing with her for a few moments, remarked:

"Mrs. Southworth, I have a friend here whom I think you would like to meet. Will you come with me and be introduced to her?"

"Certainly. I shall be very happy to know her," Constance affably returned. "Who is your friend, Miss Rainford?"

"A Miss Arnold—Marguerite Arnold."

"Marguerite! that is a beautiful name," said Constance.

"And it just suits her, too; I am sure you will say when you see her," Miss Rainford smilingly replied. "She was my chum at school three years ago. I know you will like her, Mrs. Southworth, for she is lovely; but she has been very unfortunate.

"Unfortunate! In what way?" Constance inquired, with ready sympathy.

"Shortly after she left school she lost her mother, to whom she was devotedly attached. A little later her father was taken very ill, and in the midst of this new trouble his only brother returned from the far West almost a helpless invalid. A week after his arrival Mr. Arnold died, and then for five months the dear girl gave herself up to the care of her uncle. At the end of that time death mercifully released him from his sufferings and Marguerite from her self-imposed task. She did not go unrewarded, however, for the man was rich and left her the whole of his large fortune; but the dear girl was so broken by grief, care, and confinement that she has never seemed like the same person since. Just think, dear Mrs. Southworth—three deaths in less than one year? Was not such an experience enough to break down any girl?" Miss Rainford concluded in a feeling tone.

"I certainly think so, and I am exceedingly interested in this young friend of yours," Constance responded.

"I was greatly surprised to find her here in New York," Miss Rainford went on, drawn out by the sympathy of her new friend, "but her lonely home became so intolerable to her that she could not remain in it, and about a month ago she came to New York to live. I met her one day by chance in the Museum of Fine Arts. You may think her

somewhat peculiar," Miss Rainford went on, a shade of sadness clouding her bright face. "Some people say that her troubles have crazed her, for she never smiles, and she sometimes makes strange remarks and asks very abrupt questions. I have been quite troubled about her, and somehow I was impressed that you might do her good. That is she, standing by the portières between the rooms."

Constance, glancing toward the direction indicated, saw a stately young girl, of perhaps twenty-three years, dressed in pure white with lavender trimmings. In figure she was tall, slender, graceful, and, outlined against the rich crimson curtains, she looked like an exquisite picture painted there by the hand of some skilful artist.

Her face was of a creamy whiteness, unrelieved by any color save the brilliant scarlet of her lips. Her features were delicately molded with a certain high-bred expression that denoted good blood, culture, and natural refinement. Her eyes were unusually large and expressive and of a clear, beautiful brown, with a look of pathetic sadness in them that appealed at once to Constance's tender heart. Her hair was also a rich dark brown and arranged in a loose, graceful knot at the back of her finely shaped head and fastened with a massive silver pin.

She wore no jewels, but carried in her hands a

large fan of point lace with exquisitely carved ivory sticks.

"What a very lovely girl!" Constance exclaimed under her breath.

"Isn't she?" said Miss Rainford, eagerly, then added, regretfully: "But you ought to have known her three years ago, when she was the life, the idol, the example, *par excellence,* of our school. Marguerite,"—approaching her side and laying her hand upon the girl's arm—"I have brought a friend to introduce to you—Mrs. Southworth, Miss Arnold."

Constance glanced up into the creamy face and smiled as she cordially extended her hand.

"I am very happy to meet you, Miss Arnold," she said, with a sweet graciousness all her own.

Miss Arnold stared slightly and turned a shade paler, then, bending forward, she fixed her great eyes with searching intentness upon the young wife's face, while she did not appear to notice her extended hand nor offer her own.

She bowed gracefully, however, in acknowledgment of the introduction, and repeated the young bride's name in a low, somewhat peculiar tone, Constance thought.

It seemed to her that she had never seen a sadder face, yet she was rather startled and a trifle confused by the intentness of her gaze; but remembering what Miss Rainford had said about her

peculiarities and their cause, she tried not to mind it or the rejection of her hand.

"You are a stranger in New York, I understand," she remarked by way of opening a conversation.

"Yes, I was never in the city, except for a day of shopping now and then, until about a month ago," Miss Arnold replied, while she watched every movement, every expression of her companion. Then she abruptly added: "This is your home—are you happy here?"

"Very," Constance replied, smiling a little at the strangeness of the question. "I have a very pleasant home on Madison Avenue, and I hope you will come to see me there some day, Miss Arnold."

A deep, shuddering sigh shook Marguerite Arnold's slight form at this invitation, but Constance thought is was caused by the memory of her own once happy home which had been so ruthlessly ravaged by death.

"You look happy," Miss Arnold continued, still studying the fair, smiling face. Then an expression of exceeding bitterness wreathed her scarlet lips, and she added: "But no one stays happy in this world—grief and wretchedness come to every one. You know Dante says:

> " 'Thou shalt, by trial, know what fare
> Is others' bread; how hard the path to go
> Upward and downward by another's stair.' "

Constance shivered as these weird words dropped from her lips, for somehow they smote her as a prophecy regarding her own future.

"And Tennyson also said, you remember," the strange girl went on, as if the one thought absorbed her to the exclusion of all else:

" 'Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.'

"You do not look as if you ever had a sorrow, Mrs. Southworth. It would be hard for you to realize that the life of a human being can be utterly wrecked almost at its beginning. It would be hard for you to believe that your heart could be turned to stone—that you could be deprived of the power to either smile or weep in a single summer."

Constance felt as if she could not endure much more of this kind of talk; it chilled and depressed her, and yet she experienced profound pity and sympathy for this beautiful girl who had been forced to learn such lessons of sorrow so early in life.

There were tears in her eyes as she lifted them to the pale, set face, and gently replied:

"I am sure that you must have suffered deeply to speak so hopelessly. But do you ever read Southey? He tells us that

" 'Affliction is not sent in vain
From that good God who chastens whom He loves.'

"But," she added, more brightly, and determined to change the subject, "are you fond of pictures? Here is a lovely one right beside you."

"Yes, I am very fond of art, and I have some fine paintings that were given to me by an uncle was was a great traveler," Miss Arnold announced, with something of interest, as she turned to examine the subject referred to.

"This is a Murillo, I think," Constance remarked, going nearer to observe it more closely. "I saw a good many of his pictures while I was abroad. His coloring is fine and his subjects always so true to life."

Her device proved successful, and they discussed art at some length, for it appeared to be a topic in which Marguerite took a deep interest.

While she had never had the advantage of foreign travel, Constance found her, nevertheless, very intelligent and well informed regarding different masters and their works. Her language was fluent and choice, her manner charmingly easy and self-possessed, showing that she had been most carefully reared and educated; yet she never for a moment lost that nameless something which proclaimed that she had drunk to the dregs the bitter cup of sorrow.

During their conversation they had drawn a little apart from the crowd of gay people around them

and were standing in the back drawing-room, a little behind the portières.

All at once Constance glanced up and saw her husband approaching.

She was facing him, but Miss Arnold was standing with her back toward him. The young wife nodded and smiled at him as he drew near.

"I have been looking for you, dear," Noel said in a fond, low tone; then turning, he glanced into the face of her companion.

"Marguerite!"

The name burst hoarsely from him, and then he stood gazing at her in speechless and startled amaze, as if he had been suddenly congealed to stone.

CHAPTER VI

"YOUR HUSBAND AND I ARE OLD ACQUAINTANCES"

CONSTANCE SOUTHWORTH regarded her husband with amazement as he thus familiarly, although in a tone of startled dismay, addressed her companion.

The man had suddenly become as colorless as Marguerite herself, whom he regarded with a sort of frightened stare. The muscles about his mouth twitched nervously, while the shapely hand which hung nearest his wife was convulsively clenched, thus plainly indicating that it was only by the greatest effort that he managed to preserve even the semblance of composure.

Bewildered and with a strange sinking at her heart, Constance turned her gaze from him to Marguerite.

But the fair face, although a trifle paler than she had yet seen it, was unruffled and inscrutable—it might have been sculptured from marble, it was so rigidly calm and beautiful. Her great brown eyes were lifted and fixed in a cold, steady stare upon those of Noel Southworth; her upper lip was

slightly curled, just revealing the white, even teeth beneath, and her breath came a little more quickly than was natural; but by no outward sign did she betray that the sudden appearance of this man had disturbed her in the slightest degree.

Then some movement of the young wife attracted her attention, and she turned her glance upon her.

Her face relaxed a trifle from its rigidity, while for an instant two points of flame gleamed in her eyes.

Then, with a slight bow of her stately head, she remarked in a perfectly natural tone:

"Ah! Mr. Southworth, you are astonished to meet me in New York and in such a gathering as this. Simple country girls do not often find a place in city palaces. Mrs. Southworth," turning again to Constance, "your husband and I are old acquaintances. This surprises you, no doubt, but my father having been a clergyman in a pleasant summer resort, our acquaintance was quite extensive among the people who frequented it. You are looking well, Mr. Southworth, and I have had a very delightful chat with your charming wife. But I see that Nellie wants me, and I must go to her. Pardon my leaving you so abruptly; and, Mrs. Southworth, I trust that we may meet again in the near future."

With another stately bend of her regal head Marguerite Arnold turned and moved away to join

her friend, Miss Rainford, who had beckoned to her to come to her.

The young husband and wife watched her graceful, willowy figure as it moved slowly down the room, while there was not the slightest appearance of embarrassment to indicate that she had not all her life been accustomed to mingle in the charmed circles of New York's best society.

Noel Southworth had not spoken once, save to give utterance to that one word, "Marguerite." He had been speechless—tongue-tied by this sudden apparition, which recalled incidents in his past life which he would have been glad to forget.

"You know her, then, Noel?" Constance remarked when she could bear this silence no longer, while she shot a swift, searching glance into her husband's still, white face.

"Oh, yes, I met Marguerite Arnold more than two years ago," the man replied, coming back to himself with a start, and trying to speak calmly.

"She is—very beautiful," his wife continued, her wistful eyes still studying his face.

He smiled. He was fast recovering his self-possession.

"Does the fact of my having known Miss Arnold in the past trouble you, sweetheart?" he questioned, in a low, fond tone. "If we were at home I should kiss the clouds from your brow and tell you to have

no fear, even though she is, as you say, a very beautiful woman, for my heart is true to you, love. Marguerite Arnold's father was a Presbyterian clergyman in the town of Rosemond, about fifteen miles from New York, where I once spent a very pleasant summer. I attended his church, and being a stranger in his congregation, he sought me out and gave me a cordial invitation to call at his home, where he introduced me to his wife and daughter. I found them all very charming people, and saw a great deal of them during the two monthts I spent in the town."

"You called her Marguerite," said Constance, musingly.

"So I did, sweet. Is my little wife getting jealous on account of it?" Noel queried, with a forced laugh, but flushing slightly as he recalled the shock he had experienced upon being brought so suddenly face to face with this ghost from out the past.

"No—not jealous, Noel, but I was a little surprised to hear you address her so familiarly; and then you appeared so—so startled upon meeting her."

"That is true, Constance," her husband gravely returned, and with apparent frankness. "I did address her familiarly, but she was a gay, merry girl when I met her. I saw a great deal of her, both in her own home and at the picnics, boating parties,

and various other festivities which filled the summer. Marguerite was a favorite with all, and every one addressed her by her given name; thus I also fell into the same habit. As to my being startled by her appearance here to-night, I confess I was," Noel Southworth continued, his face clouding, "for she is greatly changed. Instead of the merry, genial girl of two years ago she is like some pale statue of grief carved from marble—like Marguerite, indeed, but turned to stone," he concluded in an absent tone.

"She has had a great deal of trouble," Constance observed, the look of apprehension and anxiety fading from her face at her husband's plausible explanations.

"Yes, I heard that she has lost her father and mother," Noel replied, thoughtfully.

"That is not all her trouble," his wife remarked, as she thought that the five months of wearisome nursing during her uncle's illness must have worn upon her strength and spirits even more than the death of her parents.

Her husband started and changed color.

"What do you mean?" he questioned, searching her face with a keen, anxious glance.

Miss Rainford told me that a brother of Mr. Arnold was ill for a long time after she lost her father and mother, and she devoted herself so

closely to him that her health nearly gave way before he died."

"Oh!" said Noel Southworth, with a sigh of relief, "I had not heard of that—I did not even know that Mr. Arnold had a brother."

"He was a very wealthy man, and left the whole of his fortune to Miss Arnold for her devotion to him," Constance explained.

A great wave of color mounted to her husband's brow, which, fortunately, she did not observe; then he remarked in a quiet tone:

"Ah! that explains her presence here to-night in such elegant attire. I never saw Marguerite Arnold so beautifully dressed before. She certainly has exquisite taste, too, and carries herself like a queen," he added as he turned to observe her again and contemplated her exquisite loveliness, her reposeful manner, and the fluency with which she was conversing with a gentleman who rode upon the topmost wave of New York society. "And yet," he concluded, "there is something very unnatural about her—I can hardly believe her to be the same girl."

"No. Miss Rainford says that she is strangely changed; that some people even go so far as to say that her troubles have unsettled her reason; but if that is the case, she must be perfectly harmless in her mania," Constance remarked.

"Can that be possible?" cried her husband in a

startled tone. "No, it cannot be—I do not believe it!" and he searched that pale, beautiful face with eager interest.

It almost seemed as if some magnetic force sped from him to her as he looked, for at that instant she lifted her eyes and encountered his glance.

A wonderful change occurred in them.

The sad, pathetic look died out of them; the pupils seemed to narrow and contract until they appeared like two points of flame—like the venomous gleam in the eyes of a serpent about to spring upon its prey.

Yet not a muscle of the beautiful, statuesque face moved or changed its expression, nor did she pause for an instant in her conversation or lose an atom of her self-possession.

But Noel Southworth felt as if he had suddenly fallen under the influence of some weird spell, and with an effort he turned away from the steady gaze, a creeping sense of horror thrilling every nerve in his body.

"Come, dear," he said, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders, "we have discussed Miss Arnold sufficiently, I think. Suppose you come with me and let me introduce you to a couple of my friends whom you have never met. They have just returned from Egypt and the Nile and are full of enthusiasm over their adventures."

He drew Constance's hand within his arm and led her away to another part of the room, where he presented her to his friends, with whom she was soon engaged in an animated discussion.

But the doubts and suspicions which had disturbed her were not entirely dissipated, and several times she found herself searching for the graceful figure and pale, beautiful face of Marguerite Arnold, and wondering if there had ever been anything more than a friendly regard between her and her husband.

Then she reproached herself for her doubts.

"I have no business to allow myself to be unhappy over what has occurred," she argued. "Noel may have paid her some attention and she may have learned to care for him; but I suppose it ought to be sufficient proof of his love for me that he chose me for his wife instead of her. I—I hope that he did not encourage her. Pshaw! I will not be suspicious. I will not wrong Noel by indulging in such unjust apprehensions," she concluded, with an effort to throw off the thoughts that troubled her.

Still something seemed to tell her that no amount of care or anxiety over the illness of friends nor the death even of dearly beloved parents could so sadden and change a young and beautiful girl that she would lose the power to either smile or weep. She felt that some sorrow deeper than that must

have come into her life to congeal her to such an automaton—to sap all her girlish hopes and spirits.

Meantime Noel Southworth, after introducing his wife to his friends, had made the circuit of the rooms, in the hope of seeing something more of Marguerite Arnold.

A strange restlessness seemed to possess him ever since he had met those eyes gleamingly fixed upon him with such a blue flame blazing in their depths—since he had learned that some people imagined her reason unsettled, and he wished to watch her unobserved, if possible, and convince himself of the truth or falsity of the belief.

He knew that there had been a marvelous change in her, although she was even more beautiful now than when he last saw her.

"There never was such a perfect form or such an exquisite face in the world," he murmured, as he slowly made his way from group to group in search of her.

But she had disappeared from the drawing-room, although he searched it thoroughly. Neither could he find her in the hall nor the music-room, and he began to think that she must have left the house altogether, when it occurred to him to look into an alcove room at the end of the hall, which was separated from it only by portières of olive plush looped

back with golden cords. It adjoined the conservatory, into which it opened by sliding doors of glass.

It was most luxuriously furnished and was doubtless intended as a cozy nook for retirement, for reading, or for rest.

A small table of ebony, inlaid with pearls, stood in the centre of the Turkish rug upon the floor, and upon this rested a curiously wrought bronze lamp, having a crimson shade which cast a rose-hued glow over everything in the room, while close beside the table was a luxurious chair of olive plush with an enticing little foot-rest to match, and back of this there was an inviting couch, where one might lounge or rest if weary.

Through the large plate-glass doors, some of which were open, could be seen the rare plants and flowers with which the conservatory was filled, and in the midst of them a beautiful fountain was throwing its spray high into the air from the marble basin, which gleamed pure and white amid the dark-green foliage surrounding it. Opposite these doors there was an exquisitely carved rosewood mantel, and before this, one elbow resting upon it, her head bent upon her hand, the other clasping her dainty fan, hung idly by her side, stood the woman for whom Noel Southworth was searching.

Her back was toward him, but he could see her

face in the large mirror which surmounted the mantel.

Her attitude was replete with unconscious grace, although it was also full of weariness and dejection.

Her eyes were downcast, her features rigid, her lovely mouth set in lines of intense pain.

Noel Southworth knew, as well as if she had given utterance to them, what thoughts were thronging her brain and stamping such traces of anguish upon her face, and a wave of fierce emotion swept over his own as he looked upon this striking picture reflected in the glass.

With noiseless steps he crossed the space between them and paused beside her.

"Marguerite!" he said in a low, repressed tone, and he could not fail to see the shock which thrilled her from head to foot at the sound of his voice.

But she did not look up nor change her attitude for a moment.

Either she intended to ignore him entirely, or she was schooling herself to composure before she faced him; he could not quite decide which.

"Marguerite!" he repeated, in the same tone as before.

She lifted her head then, and slowly turned her calm, cold face upon him; but in her magnificent eyes, as they met his, there was a look which sent that same thrill of horror that he had experienced

in the drawing-room vibrating through every nerve in his body.

"Well," she simply said in an icy tone.

"You did not greet me thus the last time we met," the man returned in a reproachful tone.

"The last time we met," she repeated, her delicate nostrils dilating, her beautiful lips curling in scorn.

"Ah—well—of course I did not mean that day," Noel Southworth stammered, a guilty flush sweeping up to the waves of hair that lay upon his forehead. "Marguerite, why did you go to the church that morning and rise up in that weird way, like an accusing spirit, to confront me?"

"Why did I go to the church? To see you married, of course."

"But why? Why not have spared yourself and me the pain of such a meeting?" he persisted, a frown of annoyance clouding his face at the remembrance of the terrible shock he had sustained at that time.

"Spare you! Well, perhaps I should have been more considerate of your tender sensibilities," she mockingly retorted; "but then it was only natural that I should feel some curiosity to see the woman who had supplanted me——"

"Supplanted you!" her companion interrupted.

"Marguerite, Constance was as innocent of—of the truth as a babe."

"Undoubtedly. I believe her to be entirely guiltless of any intentional wrong toward me."

"But I am not guiltless, eh?"

"Your own conscience will answer that question more satisfactorily than I should be able to do," was the passionless response.

Again the man flushed.

Once he had been her idol—the light and joy of her heart; her pulses had quickened at his coming; her color had deepened to the tint of the wild rose at the sound of his voice; his word had been her law.

But now it was but too evident that he had lost all power to move her.

She stood there facing him, without a quiver of a muscle or the drooping of an eyelid, while her cold, calm tones jarred upon him and chilled him to the heart.

It is not an agreeable thing for a man to realize that he has lost all hold upon the woman whom he once believed nothing could turn against him.

"But you were unnecessarily cruel to me, Marguerite," he said, recovering himself after a moment. "Do you know that when I saw you standing there in that pew, confronting me, I felt for a moment as if I should drop dead in the aisle."

"It would perhaps have been better for you if you had," said the girl coldly, "better for the wife you have won."

"Heavens! what an unfeeling remark! What do you mean?" cried her companion, with sudden pallor.

Miss Arnold leaned forward until her eyes were on a level with his, while he noticed that they had narrowed and contracted as once before that evening, and holding his gaze thus, as by some power of fascination, she said in the same icy tone:

"When a man deliberately sins as you have sinned, he seldom stops and turns about in his career; he goes on, adding falsehood to faithlessness, crime to dishonor; he is like a man upon an avalanche—he has no power to stop until he reaches the bottom, where he is finally crushed by the débris which has helped to impel him on!"

"That is rather an ominous figure! Does Miss Arnold assume to be prophetic?" the young man asked, trying to speak in a light, mocking tone, yet feeling unaccountably uncomfortable and depressed by both her tone and her words.

CHAPTER VII

"SURELY THE GIRL IS MAD"

"You are somewhat acrimonious in your predictions as well," Noel continued after a moment of uncomfortable silence. "You cannot forgive me, I perceive."

"No, I shall never forgive you," was the brief reply, and still in that unmoved tone.

"Such a spirit is not in accordance with the creed that your father taught you, Marguerite—you forget that you pray 'forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.'"

"I have ceased to pray, Noel Southworth."

"You! the most rigid little devotee whom I ever knew!"

"I have ceased to have faith in either God or man."

Her companion regarded her with wonder, with even something of terror, while he began to believe that her reason had indeed been dethroned.

The last time he had seen Marguerite Arnold she was the sweetest, merriest, most trustful and

affectionate girl he had ever known. Full of sympathy and good will toward every one, gracious and affable toward old and young, rich or poor, she was a favorite wherever she went. Besides this, she had been, as he said, rigidly devout and conscientious regarding her religious duties.

Now a statue of ice could not have been, apparently, colder or more devoid of sensibility than this pale, stately girl who stood so calmly before him, looking him in the eye without a quiver of even a lash, and telling him that she had lost faith in God and man—that she had ceased to pray.

He was startled—shocked beyond measure, while a feeling of guilt oppressed him. Something within him accused him of being the cause of this direful change—as responsible for the wreck of the beautiful woman before him.

For the first time he realized something of the enormity of his sin against her, and stood gazing upon her, a dazed expression on his handsome face, his lips sealed, his eyes alone betraying the sense of guilt within him.

"Does what I have said shock your fine sensibilities?" she inquired, with a short, mirthless laugh, that was so bitter and mocking it made him shiver involuntarily. "Are you astonished to discover in Marguerite Arnold so rank a skeptic that, standing as she does on the very threshold of life, the future

seems but a sham, a mockery, a delusion to her? And does your astute mind fail to suggest a reason for the change?"

"Marguerite, I do believe that your mind is unhinged!" he responded, the conviction of insanity forcing the words from him.

"Exactly! there is not a doubt of the fact—I am conscious of it," she answered with the utmost composure. "My brain is turned to fire—it burns, burns, burns incessantly, yet without consuming; my heart is turned to a stone that continually grows harder and heavier. Do you feel proud of your work, Mr. Southworth?"

"Oh! Marguerite, do not throw the blame upon me—do not hold me responsible for anything so horrible!" the man cried, with a gesture of repulsion, his face gray and almost convulsed with guilt and terror.

"Oh, no; no sense of discomfort must be allowed to disturb you! no adverse breath must blow chill upon one who is so keenly susceptible to disagreeable influences!" was the mocking retort. Then she went on in a tone so hard and stern that it made him cringe as if under the stinging blows of a lash:

"Who won my girlish affections by the use of every art which the human mind is capable of devising? Who swore eternal devotion, and demanded in return the pledge of undying love from an inno-

cent, trusting maiden, who had been reared to believe in the goodness and truth of every one, and to regard her own word, once given, as sacred and inviolable. Who wove his toils so completely about me that I poured out my very holiest thoughts and emotions, like a sacred oblation, before him? Who lured me, by the most solemn vows and promises, bu such burning words of love—by such vivid paintings of an ideal future as would almost have lured an angel from her allegiance to Heaven? Ah! Noel Southworth, can you, remembering all this, remembering that never-to-be-forgotten summer when you were 'in Paradise'—when I was alive to the utmost fibre of my being with all that was best and holiest in woman—can you weakly whine and beg of me not to hold you responsible for the perverted nature—for the wreck that now stands in your presence?"

"But—but, I did not know—you did not tell me until it was too late, that——" stammeringly began the conscience-smitten man.

"That I was the adopted child of Mr. and Mrs. Arnold—that I was a foundling, and there was a possibility that I might not have been the offspring of an honorable marriage?" Marguerite interposed, her red lips curling away from her dazzling teeth in ineffable scorn.

"That is true," she continued; "it is also true that neither I nor my dear adopted parents considered

it right for me to betroth myself without first revealing to you my history. But I confess I was not prepared for the result; for how often had you assured me of your 'undying love'—that 'nothing could change you or make you unfaithful to me'? how often had you protested that 'no circumstances—no combination of circumstances could sever the bonds which united us—no test of love could be too severe to subject you to? It was I whom you loved, not my position or environments or prospects, for I was then a comparatively poor girl. But how did you stand the test, Noel Southworth?"

"Do not be so merciless, Marguerite, for you know that I never once dreamed that there was such a secret connected with you," he returned, in feeble extenuation of himself.

"True; but did the fact that there was something of mystery enshrouding my origin change my character or detract from my worthiness? It could not pervert my nature, corrupt my affections or detract from the charms which you had so often chanted in prose and verse"—and the point of her sarcasm here was like a dagger-thrust in the heart of the man writhing before her.

"Did it detract from the fact that I was your equal—for of that I am conscious—in every respect, save perhaps that of wealth or social position?

And these, you had always claimed, were of minor importance."

She paused as if waiting some reply, but the man could not answer her—he stood before her with bowed head and averted face, speechless—convicted of his unfaithfulness to the solemn vows which he had reiterated again and again when he had been set upon winning the love of this peerless girl; convicted and painfully conscious of his meanness, his littleness, his cowardice and treachery in deserting her whom he had deliberately wooed, and, having won, had vowed to love and cherish as long as he lived—to make her his honored wife.

"When, however," she went on, her tone growing harder with every word, "the truth was revealed to you, your ardor received its first check. I was instantly conscious of it, though you had well learned the art of the dissembler. Yet I fondly believed that it was only a passing shock—that your heart would soon rally and return to its allegiance to me. Possibly it might had you not just at that time met, and your fickle fancy been attracted to, Constance Alexander. She was the petted child of wealthy and influential parents; she was beautiful, gifted, and lovely in character as in person; no doubt or mystery enshrouded her origin to create a possible scandal in the future and thus, perchance, dim the lustre attached to the distinguished name of South-

worth. A union with her would add to, instead of detract from, the honor of your family—your position would be strengthened, your income largely increased. It did not matter that such faithlessness would rudely shatter the hopes of a happy and innocent girl, ruin her life, warp her nature, destroy her faith in humanity, and turn her heart to stone. Oh, no doubt you are guiltless of any deliberate wrong, Mr. Southworth—it cannot be possible that you will be held responsible, in view of these facts, for the wreck of a human soul!"

"Marguerite! I cannot bear this!" the man cried, hoarsely, and looking utterly crushed and wretched, for he knew but too well that he had not one extenuating word to offer in his own defense.

"No doubt it is uncomfortable to be obliged to review the past in which one shows to such disadvantage," was the calm but mocking retort.

"But I did love you, Marguerite," he confessed in humble tones.

"Love!" she repeated, with the first gleam of passion that she had shown. "You have never known the meaning of the word; your nature is utterly selfish—you are not capable of loving any one but yourself."

"You are very hard—very merciless to me."

"I hard—merciless to you! There is the proof of what I have just told you; your only thought is of

CHAPTER VIII

HOW MARGUERITE LEARNED OF HER LOVER'S TREACHERY

MARGUERITE ARNOLD, after the death of her father's brother, awoke one day to the knowledge that she was independently rich, but in spite of that no one can estimate the sense of loneliness and grief which almost crushed her as she realized that she was alone in the world. Without a relative, forsaken by her lover, nameless as far as any knowledge of her own kindred was concerned, the girl was utterly wretched and desolate.

She shut herself away from all society; she would see no one, though many friends and members of her father's church called to express their sympathy and offer her kindly counsel.

She would have been glad to robe herself in garments of deepest blackness, and thus give some slight outward expression of the great darkness which enshrouded her soul; but she had promised her father that she would wear no mourning, for he had always experienced the greatest repugnance to, and

opposed the custom, claiming that the shrouding of one's person in such sombre attire was detrimental to the health, depressing to the spirits, and saddening to others.

She might have traveled, had she chosen, since she had abundant means; but she would have felt like a wanderer and an alien traveling alone.

She did not care to spend her money upon herself—there was no one she loved to lavish it upon, and as yet she was too deeply absorbed in her overwhelming grief to realize that the poor were all about her to whom she might minister, if she would, and thus find balm for her own wounded heart.

She continued to live in the same simple fashion in the home of her childhood, mechanically going through the same duties and trying to kill time as best she could. But she lost flesh, and strength, and color—her life and her energies seemed to be slipping from her, until finally she resolved to indulge herself in the luxury of a fine span of horses, a comfortable but quietly elegant carriage, and an experienced driver.

This investment proved to be beneficial to her health and brought diversion to her also. She would spend whole days upon the road, sometimes going twenty or thirty miles from home, then, resting long enough to feed and refresh her horses, she would return late in the afternoon.

She had given up all hope that Noel Southworth would ever return to claim her as his wife, for it was long since his letters had ceased coming.

He had never formally broken their engagement or given any reason for his growing coldness and long season of silence; while she, on her part, had been too proud and sensitive to write and demand an explanation from him.

The final shock to her already overstrained heart and nerves came one day when she was off upon one of her long excursions.

She had driven to a beautiful lake some fifteen miles from her home, intending to spend the greater portion of the day there.

It was a beautiful spot, surrounded by romantic hills and dales that were covered with a rich growth of wood.

Private parties came hither for a day of fishing and boating on the lake, while there were many cozy nooks along the shore where one might steal away with novel or sketch-book and be as quiet and secluded as one wished.

It was quiet that Marguerite desired to-day, and after instructing her coachman to drive to the village to feed and rest his horses and setting a time for him to return to her, she chose a delightful spot overlooking the lake, spread her blanket, and arranged her pillows upon the mossy bed at her feet,

then drew forth her book and gave herself up to it and the charm of the place.

She read a while, but could not get interested in her story; and at last, casting it one side, she fell to musing, and finally dropped asleep.

She must have slept nearly two hours, when she was suddenly awakened by the sound of voices just below her.

She had chosen a little knoll around which the underbrush grew very thickly on three sides, the fourth looking out upon the sunlit lake.

Back of her and just beneath there was a little dell, or hollow, in which there were several great moss-covered bowlders, overshadowed by fragrant, plumy pines.

It was from this direction that the sound of voices proceeded, and lifting herself upon her elbow, Marguerite peered down upon the pretty spot and saw three bright, happy girls engaged in eating their tempting lunch from dainty baskets.

They chattered like so many magpies the while, though their voices were fresh and musical, and they were bubbling over with fun and happiness as they appeased their healthful appetites, exchanging goodies and making characteristic comments upon their excellence.

Marguerite, who could see without being seen from her leafy covert, soon became deeply interested

in watching this attractive group—Mollie, and Sue, and Grace, she learned their names to be—and sighed as she remembered that not long ago she was as happy and carefree as they.

"By the way, Sue, what are you going to wear at the wedding?" inquired the maiden who had been addressed as Mollie, while she began to dissect an immense strawberry with her milk-white teeth as she held it by the stem in her rose-tipped fingers.

"That's a secret, Mollie, which has been most sacredly kept by my dressmaker and your humble servant; but I am tempted to reveal it to you if you'll promise not to tell," was the confidential reply.

"Go ahead, Sue. You know that I am true-blue, and to prove it I will confide to you that my dress is to be of blue crêpon trimmed with white, embroidered crêpe de chine, with pearls and Catherine Mermets for decoration."

"That will be lovely," Sue responded, appreciatively. "Mine was sent home last night. It is of pale pink peau de soie, made up with embroidered chiffon of the same color, and it is too dainty for anything. And Mollie,"—this with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes,—"papa has selected just the loveliest set of diamonds as a birthday gift, which happens to come on the very date of the wedding."

"See what it is to be the only daughter of a rich

and indulgent papa, Grace!" Miss Mollie remarked as she turned to the third member of the party.

"Yes, I know that these only daughters always fare well," was the smiling reply; "but who is going to be married in a style to require such elaborate preparations?"

"Oh, Constance Alexander—a schoolmate of ours; that lovely girl in a blue sailor suit to whom I introduced you this morning. Grace only arrived about an hour before the boating party started, so I have had no time to tell her the news," Mollie explained to Sue.

"Oh! then she is the bride elect. What a lovely girl she is—so sweet and gracious to every one," Miss Grace remarked; then asked: "When is this grand wedding to occur?"

"Just one week from to-day, at high noon; it is to be a very swell affair indeed, and everybody in the vicinity is invited."

"Who is the happy expectant party?" smilingly queried Grace.

"Oh, a wealthy gentleman from New York. Constance spent the winter in the city with an aunt who brought her out, and she made this great catch—in fact, she carried off the prize of the season before the eyes of half a dozen envious belles."

"Of course, he is handsome?"

"Handsome! he's a perfect Adonis. It is a pity

he could not come with us to-day, so that I could have pointed him out to you. But you'll see him before you go home, as he is in town most of the time."

"Well, now, I've learned all but his name. I hope it is in keeping with the rest of your story," said Miss Grace, with eager interest.

"Indeed it is; it belongs among New York's *crême de la crême*—Mr. Noel Southworth. Does that suit your ladyship's fastidious taste?"

That familiar name smote upon the heart of the pale listener like a blow from a sledgehammer, and it required all the force of her will to keep from shrieking aloud in her agony.

Noel Southworth, her betrothed lover? The man who had poured the fondest words of love into her ears, who had held her in his arms, pillowed her head upon his breast, and rained kisses upon her willing lips, going to be married one week from that day at noon!

It could not be possible! It did not seem as if any man could be so false, so lost to all sense of honor, as to forswear all allegiance to one to whom he had so recently made such sacred vows, and then sever all those holy ties and wed another.

Yet she could not doubt what she heard, for those happy girls had been invited to the wedding, and evidently had long been making preparations for it.

Now her lover's silence and indifference were explained. He had deliberately thrown her over and set his fickle heart upon winning some bright new star that had appeared in New York society.

The revelation, coming as it did, was more than the long-tried girl could bear, and with a stifled moan of pain she fell back upon her pillows, white, haggard, and still.

Her coachman found her thus when, a little later, he came to tell her the carriage was waiting to take her home.

The happy girls who had been the unconscious cause of this had finished their lunch and gone to rejoin the party from whom they had stolen away to have their confidential chat, and so not a soul had known anything about the white, still figure lying upon the knoll until her servant found her there.

Greatly alarmed at her condition, he dashed down to the lake, filled her drinking cup with water, then back again to her side and vigorously sprinkled her face until she revived.

Then he helped her to the carriage, made her as comfortable as possible, and started for home.

She scarcely spoke or moved during the long ride; she was too weak and wretched to make the slightest effort but lay staring blankly up at the blue sky, her face white and set as marble.

For three days afterward she did not leave her room; she scarcely tasted food; sleep seemed to have fled from her eyes. She was nervous and restless, walking day and night to and fro in her chamber until her faithful old servant became alarmed and begged that she might be allowed to call a physician.

But Marguerite refused to see him—too well she knew that no human being could reach the seat of her trouble or heal her broken heart.

Those three days completed the work which had been slowly doing its worst during those long months that had elapsed since she had last seen her lover. All hope was crushed within her; life had lost all charm for her; she existed simply because she must, while she believed that henceforth she could never again have faith in any human being.

Two days before the marriage of Noel Southworth she was possessed with the desire to be present at his wedding.

She wanted to see the woman he was to marry and to learn something about her. She wanted to face once more the man who had been so false to her, to ascertain if he had indeed ceased to love her—if he could look unmoved upon the face which he had so often told her was to him the most beautiful in the world.

Accordingly she arose early that morning and

told Hannah, her servant, that she was going to the city for the day.

The faithful woman pleaded that she was not able—she had not strength to make such a trip; but she had made her plans and she would not be turned from her purpose. So to New York she went, and there purchased the elegant and dainty costume which has already been described.

Everything was selected with exquisite taste and was of richest texture. She would not appear, save in the most tasteful attire, before the man who had discarded her.

The following day she ordered her carriage and directed her coachman to drive her to the town of ——, while she told Hannah that she might be absent for two or three days, or she might return the following afternoon.

She reached the town late that day and took rooms at the public house of the place.

Of a chambermaid she made inquiries about the town, and once set going, the vivacious girl was only too ready to tell all she knew, and among other interesting facts related the most recent gossip regarding the approaching wedding, together with much of the family history of both parties.

Marguerite inquired if the home of the bride was near, and the stately mansions standing side by side

half embowered by magnificent trees were pointed out to her.

"The one on the left is the home of the bride, miss," said the maid; "the other place belongs to Squire Everet. Great friends the Everets and Alexanders have always been, and everybody once thought that Miss Constance would marry Mr. Laurence Everet, for they were very fond of each other as boy and girl; but the city chap is going to carry her off, after all," she concluded, with a sigh of regret.

Late that evening Marguerite, whose room opened by long windows upon the lower veranda, stole forth from the hotel, her form enveloped in a long dark traveling garment, and after wandering about the town for a time, finally bent her steps toward the home of the bride elect.

She could not have told what influence drew her hither. She certainly did not expect to get a glimpse of Constance at that hour, neither did she hope to meet the man who had been so faithless to her; but a spirit of unrest had seized her; she could not sleep, and she was obliged to do something to preserve her self-control and prevent her from going distracted.

Thus it will be readily understood that it was Marguerite Arnold whom Constance had seen standing on the lawn before her home on the night pre-

ceding her marriage, and who had afterward talked with Laurence Everet, who, no less wretched and restless than herself, had wandered for a time about the grounds of the Alexander estate, and later sought that familiar retreat by the brook.

It was, of course, Marguerite who the next day rose from her seat as the bridal party were passing out of the church, and who had thus attracted the attention of the groom and well-nigh deprived him of his self-possession.

Noel Southworth had instantly recognized her, and for one horrible moment feared that she was on the point of making a disgraceful scene by publicly denouncing him as a villain and a traitor.

The day for him was ruined; he did not know one single moment of peace after that unexpected meeting until he found himself, with his bride, speeding over the glittering rails toward New York.

Even then the next two days were not altogether enjoyable, for everywhere he went he found himself glancing hither and thither, half fearing that a marble face with great burning brown eyes would rise up from some unexpected quarter to confront him.

It was not until the noble steamer on which they were to sail swung away from her pier and bore them on toward old ocean that he felt quite safe, and then he heaved a long, thankful sigh that for

six months at least he need have no fear; while by the end of that time he hoped that Marguerite would be quietly resigned to her fate.

But he could not wholly stifle his conscience, and there were times when he experienced the keenest stings of remorse on account of the treachery of which he had been guilty.

But the party had a very gay and delightful summer, while upon their return to New York invitations poured in upon the young couple from every quarter, and they found themselves at once launched upon a season of gayety and excitement which effectually banished all unpleasant reflections.

Noel Southworth did not once dream of meeting Marguerite in New York society, consequently the shock which he experienced upon being so unexpectedly confronted by her at the reception given in honor of Miss Rainford was a terrible one.

His harrowing interview with her later, when he was led to believe that her reason had been dethroned, did not tend to soothe his awakened conscience; while he was not a little alarmed by her unreasonable and openly declared hatred of his wife.

Did she intend to revenge her wrongs upon Constance? Did she think to stab him most effectually in this way. Must he be continually haunted by the

fear that his promising future would be marred by this insane girl because of his faithlessness to her?

These were not pleasant reflections, and they made life wretched for him.

CHAPTER IX

AN ACCIDENT

One morning, on a mild winter's day, Marguerite Arnold, elegantly dressed in a tailor-made suit of dark-green cloth, with a velvet hat of the same color, in which there gleamed an aigrette of pale yellow, set lightly upon her glossy brown head, stepped aboard a street-car going uptown.

She had evidently been shopping, for there was a small package done up in soft tissue paper peeping from her seal muff, while her shopping-bag, of dark-green cloth, like her dress, with a handsome monogram embroidered on it in pale yellow silk, gave evidence of similar parcels within it.

She was strikingly yet strangely beautiful, with her pale statuesque face, her vivid scarlet lips, and those great, restless, pathetic eyes, in which there gleamed such a peculiar expression.

The car was crowded, and a single glance told her there was not a vacant seat in it.

But as she lifted her daintily gloved hand to secure a strap for support, a gentleman near whom

she was standing rose and attracted her attention by a courteous gesture.

The moment he had caught sight of her face as she stepped upon the car, he had given a slight start and a shade of pity and regret swept over his own.

"Will you do me a favor to accept my seat?" he asked as he courteously lifted his hat while addressing her.

"Thank you; but I do not mind standing," Marguerite gravely replied as she lifted her wondrous eyes to his face.

"Pray be seated," the gentleman responded, with a note of unconscious authority in his tone, and, with a faint tinge of color rising to her creamy cheeks, she sat down.

She turned a little from him in doing so—and bent her glance out of the end window of the car.

This gave him a fine opportunity to study her face, which somehow had a strangely familiar look to him, and in which he appeared to take a peculiar interest, although as he did so his mouth settled into graver lines and a puzzled expression came into his eyes.

The stranger was tall and finely proportioned, nicely dressed, neatly gloved, and bearing about him the unmistakable impression of a thorough gentleman.

He was not what would be called a handsome

man, but there was a look of intelligence and power in his face which made him very attractive and betrayed a strong character as well as high and noble aims and purposes.

Once, when the car stopped at a corner to let off some passengers, he glanced at the number of the street and made a movement as if about to alight also; then, darting another look at the beautiful face near him, he appeared to change his mind and remained where he was.

Finally Marguerite signaled to have the car stopped, and immediately rising, hurried out, as if in great haste to alight.

The gentleman followed her more slowly.

She did not wait until the car entirely stopped, but sprung to the ground, heedless of the conductor's caution to "wait a moment."

As she did so her shopping-bag caught on some projection and threw her with considerable violence against the corner of the car.

A cry of pain escaped her; the gentleman behind her echoed it with an ejaculation of dismay, and the next moment caught her, just as she was falling, unconscious, into his arms.

He bore her to the sidewalk, where, obtaining assistance, she was carried into the rear room of a drug store and laid upon a lounge.

"What has happened?" questioned the proprietor, as he hastened forward to offer his services.

"A lady has met with an accident and fainted," the gentleman replied.

"Is she your wife, sir?"

"She is not; she is an entire stranger," returned Marguerite's friend, but with rising color, and then he explained what had occurred, adding in conclusion: "I am a physician, however, and I will soon bring her out of this swoon, which I think is nothing serious."

He asked for water, and a pitcherful was brought to him.

He then requested the druggist to prepare a certain prescription for him, and while he was thus engaged he applied himself vigorously to the restoration of his patient.

She began to rally almost immediately, and also to mutter to herself in the strangest way meanwhile.

"She must never suspect," she said, her brows contracting in an angry frown, while she moved her head restlessly on the pillow, "she must not dream how I—hate her."

A look of startled intelligence leaped into her attendant's eyes as he caught these words.

"Ah! I feared so," he breathed, an expression of pity sweeping over his face; "it is a strange but a

very interesting case." Then, bending over the as yet only half-conscious girl, he inquired in a low tone: "Whom do you hate?"

"That girl—she who stole the light of the world from me—Constance Alexander! And some time she shall know what it is to have the sun put out in midday."

The young doctor gave a violent start as she muttered the name of Constance, while a look of amazement overspread his face.

"Can it be possible?" he murmured. Then, as the brown eyes began to unclose, he assumed a professional air, wiped the drops of water from her face, and as the druggist appeared with his prescription just then, he put the glass to her lips and quietly bade her drink. She darted a swift look of inquiry up at him and then unquestioningly obeyed him.

There had been the same note of authority in his tone as when he had asked her to take his seat in the car, and she instinctively yielded to it.

"You are better," he quietly remarked; then, as she attempted to put her hand to her head and involuntarily cried out with pain, he added: "Ah! what is this?"

"I fear that my arm is hurt," Marguerite faintly replied.

The young man examined it and found that the trouble was in the elbow.

"You have strained the ligaments about the joint —it was almost a dislocation," he said. "Do you not know that it is very dangerous to attempt to leave a car before it stops? You were very careless to do so," he gravely added.

"Did I?" she asked, indifferently. "I did not mind whether it had stopped or not—I was thinking of something else."

Again her companion gave her a swift, searching look, and an expression of perplexity overspread his face.

She caught the look, and a faint flush swept over her cheeks; then, in spite of the pain it caused her, quickly paling both cheeks and lips, she sat up.

"I would like to go home," she remarked, with quiet dignity.

"Yes, that will be the best for you, but are you able to walk. I will call a carriage for you."

"If you please," she briefly returned.

The gentleman went out into the store and dispatched one of the clerks for a cab.

There was one standing on the corner opposite, and it was soon at the door; then the physician returned to his patient.

"Will you come now?" he gently inquired.

"Yes, thank you," she replied, frankly accepting the hand he extended to assist her to rise; "but

first tell me, please, to whom I am indebted for so much kindness."

The young man hesitated an instant before answering her. Then he said:

"I am a physician—my name is Reginald Knox."

"Thank you; and mine is Marguerite Arnold. I am grateful for your attention to me, Dr. Knox, and"—sweeping his face with a somewhat anxious look—"it was very heedless in me not to wait until the car had stopped before alighting."

Dr. Knox bowed a grave assent to this admission. Then, he asked, while a most genial, attractive smile illumined his fine face:

"Will you allow me to attend you to your door? I do not quite like to leave you to get home alone while your pulse is in such an uncertain state."

"You are very good," Marguerite responded, appreciatively. "I believe I shall feel a little safer to have you go with me if it will not inconvenience you—though the distance is short."

She stooped to gather up her muff and shopping-bag from the couch, but another fierce twinge of pain drove back all the color that had returned to her lips.

Dr. Knox observed it even though she had made no sound.

"I am inclined to think that this elbow will need

looking after for a little while," he remarked, as he picked up the articles for her.

Then, stepping to her other side, he offered her his arm, which she unhesitatingly accepted, and led her out to the cab.

"Where to?" he questioned after he had seen her comfortably seated in it.

"Just around this next corner—No. 43," she replied.

He bowed, closed the door, mounted the box beside the driver, and a few moments served to bring them to the door of Miss Arnold's home.

Alighting, Dr. Knox assisted the lady out, paid and dismissed the driver, then helped her up the steps to her door; but he noticed that, in spite of the self-control she was striving to exercise, she was suffering greatly.

After ringing the bell for her, he remarked:

"Now, Miss Arnold, if you will give me the name of your family physician, I shall be happy to summon him for you. I am sure your injury needs immediate attention, and your system also requuires treatment."

Once more Marguerite lifted her eyes and studied her companion's face, after which she remarked:

"I do not know a physician in the city. I have only recently come here to reside, and so, if you please, I will put myself under your care."

The young man flushed.

He was quite sensitively organized, in spite of the predominating element of strength in his character, and somehow he almost felt as if he had begged the case.

But he had become deeply interested in this strange though beautiful girl, who, he was convinced, was laboring under some mental derangement, and he was anxious to see more of her. Therefore, assuming a professional air he returned:

"Very well, Miss Arnold. If that is your wish I will do the best I can for you."

A servant now admitted them, and the young man was instantly impressed with the elegance and exquisite taste exhibited in the furnishings of his patient's home.

He was conducted at once to Miss Arnold's private sitting-room, where the injured arm was examined and treated according to his best judgment. Then, after writing a prescription for some tonic he wished her to take, he adroitly drew her into conversation.

There was a peculiar charm about the young physician, and Marguerite became interested in him before she realized that he was one of the sex she had recently learned to suspect and despise and had determined to ignore.

Perhaps the fact that he was a doctor made some

difference; but, at any rate, she conversed with freedom upon various topics in a very intelligent and entertaining manner.

He finally took his leave, promising to see her again some time during the next day, but left his address in case she should need to send for him before that.

"It is a most singular case," he muttered as he went down the steps. "There is undoubtedly some trouble with the brain; the eyes—that narrowing and contracting of the pupil, followed by that fiery gleam—indicate that; while now and then a suspicious glance directed at me showed that she was wondering if I had noticed anything strange about her. But what could she have meant by that exceedingly queer remark about Constance—that sweet sister of mine whom everybody loves? It is a very interesting subject, and one that I shall study thoroughly if she will only give me the opportunity. First, however, I will see Constance and ask her a few questions. I must find out the cause for this singular hatred."

Instead of going to his office he took a car and proceeded farther uptown, finally alighting before a quiet but elegant residence, where he mounted the steps and rang the bell.

"Is Mrs. Southworth at home?" he inquired of the servant who opened the door for him.

"Oui, madame at home is," smilingly answered the pretty French maid, with an equally pretty accent.

She recognized the caller and immediately led him to the library, which he entered without ceremony.

Constance Southworth, attired in the daintiest of tea gowns, sat at a table reading a new magazine, and made a very pretty picture against the darker and richer hues of the furnishings of the room.

She threw down her book upon her brother's appearance, and, springing to her feet, extended both hands to him, exclaiming, with a happy smile:

"Oh, Reginald! how glad I am to see you! To what happy circumstance do I owe this unexpected visit?"

"To an accident, dear," the young man smilingly responded, as he bent forward and imprinted a fond kiss upon her lips.

"An accident!" she exclaimed in a startled tone. "Noel——"

"No, dear," her brother interposed, "Noel is all right as far as I know; but accident gave me a patient in your neighborhood, and so I have dropped in for a little chat with my sister."

Dr. Reginald Knox Alexander was Constance Southworth's only brother, some three or four years her senior, and a practicing physician in New York City, as has previously been intimated.

He was still unmarried, for two reasons; one was

because he was too deeply absorbed in his profession to give much thought to anything else; the other, he had never yet met the young woman who had power to touch his heart and arouse the one grand passion of his life.

It will be readily understood why he had refrained from giving his full name to Marguerite Arnold.

He had been more startled than he would have liked to own when she gave utterance to those sentiments of hatred toward his dearly loved sister.

He knew, however, that she was not wholly responsible for what she said; therefore, when she had asked his name, wishing her to trust him, and instinctively knowing that she would not if she should discover him to be the brother of the woman toward whom she cherished such animosity, he had simply withheld his surname and told her that he was Dr. Reginald Knox.

The moment she had entered the car he knew there was something wrong about her mental condition; the peculiar expression of her eyes had told him this, also something unusual in her manner, which a casual observer would not have noticed; and so, when she left the car he followed her with the intention of observing her more closely if he could do so without attracting her attention and making himself obnoxious.

The accident opened the way for him to do so. It

was an unexpected and a golden opportunity, which he resolved to make the most of.

Her ready choice of him as her physician and his subsequent visit to her own home was a rare boon, and he had purposely prolonged his call, exerting all his conversational powers in the hope of learning wherein her weak point lay.

She talked fluently and well upon topics which he introduced, and he was finally convinced that she must be afflicted with some peculiar form of monomania with which his sister was, in some inexplicable way, connected.

Hence his visit to Mrs. Southworth, whom he intended to question in an indirect way regarding her acquaintance, if any, with his patient, and what she knew concerning her history.

CHAPTER X

DR. ALEXANDER LEARNS SOME INTERESTING FACTS

"I AM always glad to see you, Reginald—you know that," Constance remarked, in reply to her brother's explanation regarding his call at that hour. "And now it is so near lunch time, you must stay to keep me company—will you?"

"With the greatest pleasure in the world, dear," the young man replied as he drew off his gloves. "Have you heard from the absent ones within the last few days?" for Mr. and Mrs. Alexander were still traveling in the far Southwest.

"Yes, I had a long letter from mamma only last evening. I will read it to you presently. But tell me, who is your new patient, Reggie?"

"A young and beautiful woman, my dear Constance," Dr. Alexander responded, with a roguish twinkle in his expressive eyes.

"Really!" she exclaimed, with eager interest, "and won through an accident, too! How romantic. Who knows what may happen on account of it? What is the lady's name?"

"Miss Marguerite Arnold."

"Oh!" and a slight cloud dimmed the brightness of Mrs. Southworth's fair face for a moment.

"Yes; do you know her?" her brother inquired as he remarked it, and beginning to think that the mystery of Miss Arnold's strange hatred for his sister was developing in interest.

"Yes, I have met her. I was introduced to her recently at a reception given to Miss Nellie Rainford. Miss Arnold was a chum of hers at Vassar," Constance gravely replied. She had never been quite at ease regarding Noel's extreme astonishment upon meeting Marguerite.

"She is very beautiful, Constance."

"Yes, she is," Mrs. Southworth assented; "but—did you notice anything peculiar about her?

"Peculiar?" repeated her brother in a non-committal tone.

"Yes; she is said to be not quite in her mind. She has had a great deal of trouble during the last year or two."

"What kind of trouble?" inquired the young physician.

"All I know is what Miss Rainford told me," Constance returned, a flush mantling her cheek, her glance wavering slightly beneath her brother's earnest look. "She said that Mr. and Mrs. Arnold had both died within a few weeks of each other, and this

almost broke the poor girl's heart. Then an aged uncle was ill for several months, and Marguerite devoted herself so tirelessly to him that her own health was shattered. The man died and made her what recompense he could by willing his large fortune to her, and she is now very rich. But, truly, Regie, I never saw any one who impressed me as being so strangely sad. She seemed to me more like a statue of despair than a human being. Didn't you notice anything unusual in her manner?"

"Well, yes; it did strike me that she might be laboring under some mental depression," the young doctor admitted.

"But you have not told me about the accident. I hope it was nothing serious," Constance remarked, with sympathetic interest.

"No, I do not apprehend anything very obstinate," her brother replied, and then gave her an account of what had occurred. He concluded by asking: "Has Miss Arnold no friends in the city?"

"I think not. Nellie Rainford, of whom, by the way, I am becoming quite fond, says that she is the most lonely creature imaginable. She came to the city some three or four months ago, bought that house on Ninety-seventh Street, furnished it elegantly, and lives there alone with her servants."

"Where was her home previous to coming to the city?"

"I think Nellie said the town of ——."

"Does she go into society much?"

"No; very seldom, and then only because Nellie coaxes her and almost insists upon it."

"What does she do to occupy her time?"

"She reads and paints a great deal. Did you notice her pictures, Regie?"

"Yes, some of them."

"Well, a great many of them are her own work, and Miss Rainford claims that they are very fine. I have never seen any of them, for I have not yet called upon her; somehow I have rather dreaded to."

"Um——" was all the reply that Dr. Alexander made to these remarks. Then he changed the subject by asking for the letter from his parents; and by the time this had been read and discussed lunch was announced, so that nothing more was said about Miss Arnold at that time.

The young physician hurried away immediately after lunch, for he had a plan in view he was anxious to carry out before the day was over.

He made some hasty rounds among his patients, then taking a cab to the Grand Central Station, he was soon spinning out over the rails toward the town of Rosemond, Marguerite Arnold's former home.

A ride of less than an hour brought him to his

destination, when he immediately bent his steps toward the public house of the place.

Here he inquired of the landlord if he could direct him to some reliable and experienced physician.

"If you want experience, I know of no one better than old Dr. Wright; he's been practicing here for more'n thirty years," the landlord responded as he looked his questioner over from head to foot and thought he was a pretty healthy specimen to be seeking medical advice.

"Then he is the man I wish to see," Reginald Alexander returned, and after inquiring where he could be found, he started forth to interview the venerable doctor.

He was fortunate enough to find him at home, and after introducing himself, he entered at once upon the object of his visit.

"I have come to you upon a somewhat singular errand, Dr. Wright," he remarked, "and one which I must ask you to regard as strictly confidential."

"Certainly, certainly, my young friend—I consider all professional confidences as inviolable," was the hearty and courteous response.

"I have been told that you have been located in this place for a great many years," Reginald remarked.

"Upward of thirty, Dr. Alexander—long enough

to get well rooted and grounded, eh?" returned his companion, smiling.

"It would seem so, certainly," the young man replied, adding: "Of course you were well acquainted with the late Rev. Mr. Arnold and his family."

"Well, yes, my young friend. I do not believe you could have hit upon anybody who knew Mr. Arnold as well as I knew him. He was my dear friend and confidential adviser, and I was his physician for many years," said Dr. Wright, evincing some emotion.

"Then, sir, I am going to open my heart to you, for I believe if any one can help me to solve a mystery that is troubling me, you can do so," Dr. Alexander remarked, and then he proceeded to describe the accident which had given Marguerite Arnold to him as a patient. He explained her case and his impressions regarding her mental condition, which he believed might be successfully treated if he could but ferret out the cause which had produced it.

The disease, he stated, was liable to grow worse unless something was done very soon to arrest it.

"I cannot believe," he said, in conclusion, "that her mental derangement has been wholly produced by the loss of her parents, nor the confinement and strain upon her system occasioned by the long care of her uncle, as I have been told. It seems to me there must be something else behind that—some

deeper and more potent grief, which she has nursed and brooded over until it has injured her mind."

The old physician listened with a very grave face and without making any comment until Reginald had finished his story.

Then with deep feeling he remarked:

"My friend, I am deeply interested in this case. In the main, you are correct in your surmise that there is a more potent reason for Marguerite Arnold's condition than the loss of her parents. I have known her all her life, and until within the last year and a half she was one of the sweetest girls it has ever been my privilege to know. She was the idol of her father and mother and the favorite of the whole town. William Arnold was a rare man—any one would be convinced of that upon being told that he was settled over a church here for more than twenty years; while his wife was a woman worthy of him in every way. I do not wish to be prosy," the doctor interposed, "but I think it will be best for you to know Miss Arnold's whole history if she is to be under your care."

"Yes—yes. Pray be as explicit as you think advisable," Reginald remarked, with considerable eagerness.

"Marguerite was reared and educated with the greatest care, and after graduating from the high school of Rosemond took a course at Vassar, where

she stood very high in point of scholarship. Soon after her return from college, however, it became evident that she would not long be allowed to remain the bright particular star of our village——"

"Aha! I thought so!" Reginald Alexander at this point muttered under his breath, but flushing a vivid crimson as he said it.

"It was according to the law of nature, I suppose, that one so beautiful and talented would be wooed and won," his companion resumed, "but I confess that I was sorry when a chap from the city came up here to spend the summer and began to show her marked attention. He appeared to be a fine fellow, however, and report said that he had a large fortune at his command. At any rate, he spent money as if there was no bottom to his purse, while he was a constant visitor at the parsonage; and ere long it was rumored that he had won our village beauty and favorite. I hinted as much to Mr. Arnold one day. He smiled and sighed, and said 'yes, he had given his consent conditionally.'

"I did not ask him what his conditions were, but I suspected their nature. A little later I missed the young man, and upon inquiry learned that he had returned to the city.

"I was very busy during the fall—too busy to concern myself about love affairs, but supposed that after a proper time he would return and the young

people would be married. In December Mrs. Arnold was suddenly taken ill. I was, of course, called to attend her, and saw at once that she had not long to live. I noticed that Marguerite was looking pale and thin, but knowing how devoted she was to her parents, I laid it to anxiety regarding her mother's condition. Mrs. Arnold's illness terminated in death in less than three weeks, when the husband, worn out with ceaseless watching and grief, was stricken down, and within a month was laid beside his wife.

"A brother of Mr. Arnold, who for years had been something of an invalid, and who had come on from the West to attend Mrs. Arnold's funeral, took a sudden cold; his disease—consumption—was aggravated, and for three months Marguerite nursed him as faithfully and tenderly as she had previously nursed her parents. After his death his will was read, and everybody was rejoiced to learn that he had left the girl sole mistress of a handsome fortune. But during this wretched time of sickness and death at the parsonage I was very anxious regarding her health. I frequently cautioned her to be careful and begged her to let me find a nurse to relieve her of some of her care; but she invariably replied that she was well and needed no one. I was not satisfied that she was, although I wondered at her powers of endurance. She had lost flesh, her cheeks were hollow, her eyes sunken; she never smiled nor

spoke unless I pointedly addressed her, and then in such a listless, mechanical way that she seemed more like a talking doll than a human being. At first I laid it to grief for her parents, and yet it did not seem possible that one so young and of her naturally sunny temperament could fall into such a settled state of apathy and despair. I hoped that she would rally after the death of her uncle, but she shut herself away from every one—she would not even allow me to visit her, although I begged that she would still regard me as her friend and let me care for her. But no, she needed no care, she said. She was utterly changed—inexplicably changed. Then it suddenly occurred to me that I had seen nothing, heard nothing, of her lover for a long time; he had not been present at the funeral of either Mr. or Mrs. Arnold, and I began to suspect there might be trouble in that quarter. If there had been, that would account for her excessive melancholy.

"About midsummer I heard that the young man had married another girl, and then everything was clear as day to me, for I well knew that Marguerite Arnold was one who could not love lightly, and it would be like tearing her heart from her bosom to find that she had loved unwisely—that her trust had been betrayed."

"What could have been the reason for the man's desertion of her?" Reginald Alexander inquired.

"That is more than I can tell you, young man. I have never heard any explanation of the affair, although, of course, a great many comments and surmises as to why it was broken off have reached my ears from time to time."

"Did you observe anything in Miss Arnold's looks or manner which led you to suspect that her reason had been impaired by her disappointment?" Reginald asked.

"I knew that she was sadly changed, and at times I did fear that her grief and trouble might result in mental derangement unless she could have some diversion. I noticed also, upon two or three occasions as she passed me in her carriage, that there was a peculiar expression about her eyes. But, of course, as she refused to consult me professionally, I was powerless to do anything for her."

"Was there any tendency to mental trouble in the Arnold family?" Reginald inquired.

Dr. Wright shot a quick, curious glance at the young man, thought a moment before replying, then he said, gravely:

"If you are to be her medical attendant, Dr. Alexander, you surely ought to be told all there is to be known about her. Marguerite Arnold was an adopted child."

"Adopted!" exclaimed the young man, astonished.

"Yes, and under the most peculiar circumstances. Her parentage is not known."

"How exceedingly unfortunate!" said Reginald Alexander, looking deeply disturbed.

"Yes very, under the circumstances," assented Dr. Wright, "for if we could know whether the mental derangement is hereditary or not, it could, of course, be treated more intelligently."

"Are you at liberty to tell me the circumstances of her adoption?" the young man inquired.

"I think so," thoughtfully returned his companion. "I shall take the responsibility of doing so, at all events; for I believe it is only right that you should know the truth."

"Thank you; I shall be grateful for the confidence," said Reginald.

"One evening," began the old doctor, "just before Mr. Arnold accepted the call to his pastorate here, and while they were residing in Brooklyn, the doorbell rang just as they were on the point of retiring. The servants had gone to bed and Mr. Arnold himself answered the ring. Imagine his surprise when, instead of some parisioner, he saw a basket, covered with a heavy shawl, standing upon the steps close to the door. He took it in, thinking that some friend had taken this way to make him a donation, or perhaps play some practical joke upon him, as it happened to be the first day of April.

"Uncovering the basket, he found a lovely infant lying upon a pillow within it. It was wide awake, but perfectly quiet and comfortable, and, looking smilingly in his face, began to coo in the most engaging manner. Mrs. Arnold's loving heart prompted her to take the little one as a God-sent gift, and she gathered it close to her arms, all the mother-love, which had so yearned for a child of her own, going out at once to the tiny stranger.

"Meantime Mr. Arnold had discovered a note pinned to some clothing in the bottom of the basket.

"There were only three or four lines, written in a beautifully clear and ladylike hand. As near as I can remember, they were these:

"For the sake of humanity, I beseech you to take my child and rear her to be a good and useful woman. Before many days her wretched mother—her only parent—will be dead. Her name is Marguerite."

"That was all, but it was very comprehensive—very suggestive——"

"Suggestive. In what way?" inquired Dr. Alexander, who did not quite catch the meaning of his companion.

"Why, it implies that the child was not honorably born," replied Dr. Wright.

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Reginald, in a surprised, regretful tone.

"Certainly. That is the only construction you can put upon the words—'her wretched mother—her only parent.' I should have told you that those last words were heavily underlined. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold both put that construction upon them, and I think almost every one would."

"Yes, perhaps, if, as you say, they were emphasized," said Dr. Alexander, thoughtfully.

" 'What shall we do with her?' my friend asked of his wife.

" 'Keep her, William,' she unhesitatingly replied; 'she is a lovely child; oh, let me have her.'

"It was the yearning cry of a hungry heart long denied.

"He could not, or he would not, deny her petition, and thus Marguerite was adopted by those two noble people, who soon learned to love her as well as if she was their very own.

"As they were on the point of removing from Brooklyn to Rosemond, they decided that it would be best to say nothing about the incident to any one, as they hoped in their new home to be able to keep the secret of adoption from every one."

"Was there nothing in the basket by which the child could be identified in the future?" Reginald inquired.

"Nothing. There were a few changes of clothing of simple and inexpensive material, but very neatly made. They were not marked in any way—there was absolutely nothing to serve as a clew to her parentage, save the handwriting of the mother."

"It is a very romantic story," said Reginald, thoughtfully.

"Yes, it is," his companion replied, "and no one living here, save myself, has ever learned the truth. Mr. Arnold told it to me in confidence when, at one time, Marguerite was ill and I asked some questions bearing upon the law of heredity, which he could not truthfully answer and keep his secret. I cannot feel that I am doing wrong in giving this information to you, so that you may be able to treat her intelligently," the doctor gravely concluded.

"Thank you, sir; and let me assure you that your confidence will never be betrayed," Reginald returned, then added: "And now, will you kindly tell me the name of the man to whom she was betrothed and who deserted her?"

"Certainly. His name was Noel Southworth!"

CHAPTER XI

DOCTOR AND PATIENT

If Reginald Alexander had not possessed an unusual degree of self-control, he must have betrayed the consternation with which the utterance of this name filled him. As it was he was stricken speechless for the moment, his face pale, his eyes averted.

Dr. Wright, however, believed him to be absorbed in considering the case of his patient, in view of the facts which had just been revealed to him.

"Noel Southworth—the husband of my sister—the man who betrayed the confidence of that lovely girl and deserted her for another!" the young man was saying to himself, while a strange tumult raged within his heart.

He understood it all now—the cause of Marguerite Arnold's mental trouble, her unreasonable and, until now, inexplicable hatred of Constance, her unsmiling, statuesque face, that fearful light which now and then leaped into her beautiful eyes, and her aversion to all society.

Ah! more than this was explained to him as he recalled a circumstance which had long puzzled him.

He had been the "best man" at his sister's wedding, and as the bridal party were passing out of the church he had caught a glimpse of that graceful figure as it arose in the rear of the building and leaned forward, peering so eagerly at the newly wedded couple as they were moving down the aisle.

Now he knew, too, why that face had seemed so familiar to him, when Marguerite entered the car that morning. Now he was also sure that he understood Noel's strange pallor and nervousness, which had so puzzled him through the wedding breakfast and afterward, until he was driven to the station.

Even after arriving there he remembered that he had glanced uneasily about him, as if in dread of seeing some one whom he was anxious to avoid.

Surely he had gained a great deal of light by coming to Marguerite Arnold's former home, and he was glad that he had obeyed the impulse which had prompted him to come.

But he was bitterly disappointed in his brother-in-law, whom he had regarded with the most fraternal feelings. If he had been untrue to one pure and lovely woman, was there not a doubt as to whether he would make Constance happy in the future?

But after the first shock he forced himself to put aside all personal feeling and discuss the condition

her—even her hands were destitute of rings; but her toilet, though so severely simple, was becoming in spite of her pallor.

The young doctor greeted her courteously, yet with a trifle of reserve in his manner, for as he entered the room he had caught the peculiar gleam in her eyes—a cunning, suspicious look, which warned him to be very wary in his intercourse with her.

She had been reading, but she immediately shut her book and slipped it underneath some papers that were lying upon the table near her.

The act instantly attracted his attention.

She had evidently been interested in some subject which she did not wish him to know about, and forthwith he determined that he would ascertain the nature of the book before he left the house.

"I hope I find you comfortable this morning, Miss Arnold, if not really better," he remarked, in a genial tone as he took the chair her maid offered him.

Yes, she was quite comfortable just then, she told him, although she had not slept well; she had suffered considerable pain during the night.

"That was to be expected," he returned. "Such a sprain is rather an ugly thing to deal with at first. Do you rest well at night, Miss Arnold?"

Instantly, at this question, those great eyes flashed

up to his, a suspicious gleam in their wine-like depths. But the doctor's glance was fixed admiringly upon a picture that rested upon an easel in the corner behind her, and as he had spoken in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone, she appeared to be somewhat reassured.

"No," she reluctantly admitted. "I have been troubled with wakefulness for some time."

"Ah! we must see about that, I think," Reginald returned. "I thought yesterday, from the state of your pulse, that your system needed a little toning up. Can you attribute your restlessness to any cause?"

"Such as what?" she demanded, almost sharply.

"Well, enforced wakefulness, such as long watching and caring for the sick, will sometimes produce insomnia," was the quiet reply.

Reginald thought that if he could only get her to confide something of her history to him voluntarily, it would be a great step gained.

He was gratified to see the suspicious look die out of her eyes at his reply.

"Well, yes," she returned, after considering a moment. "I watched incessantly with my father and mother during their last illness, also with an uncle, and—and—" with a covert glance—"I have not slept well since then."

"Ah! I thought we should soon find a solution to

the trouble. You know doctors have to go to the bottom before they can feel justified in any mode of treatment," Dr. Alexander said, with a smile. "How long have you suffered in this way?"

"It is more than a year since I lost my parents," Marguerite responded, drawing a deep breath of pain, but without a sign of a tear. "My uncle died three months later."

"That must have been a great strain upon you," Reginald remarked in a tone of gentle sympathy. "I do not need to tell you that you will not be really well again until this habit of wakefulness is conquered, and I am sure you would be glad to sleep naturally once more, Miss Arnold."

A spasm of pain contracted the features of the beautiful girl, a shiver ran over her frame and clasping her hands convlusively, she cried out in a tone of agony which told her companion more than she realized, and almost brought tears to his eyes:

"Oh, if I could! Ah, it is dreadful! You cannot imagine what it is to lie awake through the endless hours of the night and think over the same thoughts, live over the same scenes, month after month, with your brain beating and throbbing like the ceaseless pendulum of a great clock, until, driven to despair, you have to rise and walk, walk, walk, to drown it; until you are ready to shriek aloud with the fear that you are possessed with some

demon who is maliciously seeking to drive you m——"

"Miss Arnold, stop!" said the young doctor in a tone of kindly but inflexible authority, though he was secretly appalled by this revelation of the hold which her mania had gained upon her.

Heretofore she had held herself so well in hand that he did not think her case could be so critical, but he realized now that unless she had the most judicious treatment she would ere long be a raving maniac.

She checked herself reluctantly as his command, and looked up at him with something of astonishment. As she met his glance, which was at once pitiful, kind, and anxious, a delicate flush arose to her cheeks, then mounted to her brow, then her eyes fell before his. The young physician was strangely moved as he remarked this evidence of his power over her. His own heart beat more rapidly, and a mighty yearning to save her took possession of him.

"Miss Arnold——"

She raised her eyes again, and he smiled frankly into them.

"Must I apologize for using the authority of my office?" he asked. "I came here, I know, simply to attend to the sprain in your arm. Shall I consider that my duty ends there, or, since I have discovered that you need other and more radical treatment,

will you trust me and let me care for you as my judgment dictates?"

The fair girl studied his face for a full minute with a glance which seemed determined to read his inmost soul.

"Trust you! What do you mean by that? To what extent?" she suspiciously demanded at last.

"To the extent of candidly stating to me all your symptoms and following my directions to the letter.

"You hesitate to promise so much," he continued, as she did not reply, while he suddenly resolved upon attempting a delicate experiment. "I would not force your confidence, believe me; my only desire is to re-establish your health, which I can plainly perceive is greatly undermined. I am sure I do not need to tell one of your intelligence that long continued insomnia will produce permanent brain trouble if——"

"No—I know it," Marguerite breathed, with a covert glance toward the paper which concealed the book she had been reading when he entered.

A gleam of intelligence came into Dr. Alexander's eyes as he noticed it, and he felt confident that she had been studying some work upon insanity.

"And you certainly wish to avoid such a trouble," he resumed; "you would shrink from becoming a victim to mania or monomania?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" she cried, wildly, as she clasped

her hands across her brow and gazed up at him with horrified eyes, while a shudder of repulsion shook her from head to foot. "Can you save me?"

"I think so—I believe so, if you will trust me," he gravely answered, while his heart leaped at her appeal. "If you will give me your entire confidence and implicitly follow my directions."

She sprung to her feet and began to walk the floor with excited mien and steps.

"Give him my entire confidence! Can I tell him all—can I tell him how I hate her?" she muttered under her breath, but apparently so absorbed in the passion of the moment as to have forgotten Reginald's presence.

He caught enough of her words to comprehend her meaning, and a grave and anxious look settled over his face.

He never had been so deeply interested in a patient before. Her wonderful beauty, her critical state and her sad history, all appealed to his tenderest feelings, and he felt that he must win her confidence, he must rescue her from the fearful doom hanging over her.

"Please be seated, Miss Arnold," he said in the same authoritative tone which he had used so successfully before, and involuntarily she came back to her chair and sat down.

He immediately dropped the subject which so ex-

cited her, examined her arm and gave directions regarding its treatment until he should come again, and wrote a prescription which she was to take hourly.

Then he drifted into lighter conversation—to the current topics, to art, in which she appeared to be especially interested, and finally, after relating two or three anecdotes that were bright and full of wit, he rose to take his leave, and somewhat encouraged to perceive a more animated look upon her face than he had ever seen there before.

"I have a bright little book at my office, Miss Arnold, which I think would interest you. May I send it up?" he asked as he drew on his gloves.

"Yes, indeed; please do," she said, eagerly.

"Very well; but my orders are that you read nothing else until I come again," he said, smiling. "If time hangs heavily on your hands go for a long drive in the park."

"I am tired of driving in the park," Marguerite replied, inertly. "I know every inch of ground there, and this driving about without any object save to kill time is very wearisome to me."

"You are right," Dr. Alexander thoughtfully replied; then, as an idea suddenly occurred to him, he added:

"May I give you an object and thus accomplish a double amount of good?"

Marguerite looked up, her face assuming an expression of keen interest, and he knew that he might ask her to do anything he wished if it would only serve to help her to forget herself.

"Certainly you may. It would be a boon indeed if I could feel that I was of the slightest use to a single person in the world," she answered, with pathetic earnestness.

"You can be of great use if you will," Reginald said, gravely. "I have a patient—a little cripple—living at No. 20 —— Street. She is in great need of fresh air and gentle exercise. I am going there from here. May I tell her that you will take her for a drive in the park at two this afternoon?"

"Yes, and thank you for the privilege, Dr. Knox," Marguerite answered, heartily, as she involuntarily held out her hand to him.

He clasped it warmly, a strange thrill creeping along the nerves of his arm to his heart as he did so.

"I ought to thank you, rather," he said, smiling down into her earnest eyes, which looked very beautiful just then with the glow of a new interest in them, "for it will be a red-letter day to the poor little one—Amy Holbrook is her name. Now, good-morning. I fear that I have wearied you with my unprofessional call."

"No, indeed," said Marguerite, with the nearest approach to a smile on her lips that had rested there

for many months. "I believe you have done me good."

She went to the window and watched him as he walked with a strong, elastic step down the street. But as he turned the corner she went wearily back to her chair, while a gloomy look settled over her face.

"He suspects the truth," she muttered. "Will he save me, or shall I die in a—madhouse?"

CHAPTER XII

REGINALD ALEXANDER MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY

"It is a clear case of monomania," Reginald Alexander mused as he left Marguerite Arnold's presence and bent his steps toward the home of his little crippled patient. "Love for the coward who deserted her and hatred for the woman who supplanted her have nearly accomplished the ruin of one of the loveliest women the world contains, and yet she is perfectly sane upon every other subject—in fact, one of the most intelligent ladies whom I have ever met. What shall I do for her? How shall I treat this delicate case, which is rendered all the more difficult because of her vicinity to the cause of her trouble? These are questions which cause me great anxiety. I must guard against all suspicion of my relationship to Constance, for, let her once mistrust it, and it would destroy all her confidence in me. Truly, I have put myself in a difficult position. I think I must see Miss Rainford, solicit her aid, and inform her of the harmless change in my

cognomen. I wish, however, that I could persuade Miss Arnold to leave the city for the present."

He made his visit to his little cripple and gladened her heart by the promise of the coming pleasure, after which he repaired to Miss Rainford's residence, and sent up his card to her with a penciled line asking for a private interview.

The young lady soon made her appearance, and, having exchanged greetings, Dr. Alexander at once broached the object of his visit.

He told her of the accident of the previous day, and how it had resulted in throwing her old friend into his hands as a patient, and, having made this explanation, he remarked:

"I have made an alarming discovery regarding Miss Arnold which causes me great anxiety. I find her, Miss Rainford, in a state bordering upon insanity. It was to inform you of this and ask your co-operation in certain directions that I have called upon you this morning."

"Yes, I, too, have feared that Marguerite was in a very critical condition," Miss Rainford remarked, with a troubled face. "She has sadly changed since we were at school together. The loss of her parents seems to have worn upon her fearfully, and yet it does not seem possible that even their death could have produced such excessive melancholy as she exhibits."

"You know of nothing else—no other trouble which could have helped to produce this change?" Dr. Alexander remarked, inquiringly, while he regarded her searchingly.

"No. Marguerite was never one to make any complaint if the world did not go right with her. We have been in the habit of corresponding until within the last year and a half, when, through my fault—I was traveling abroad—our correspondence ceased. But if she had any secret trouble, she never mentioned it."

"Miss Rainford," said the young physician, with sudden resolution, "I am sure that I can rely upon your discretion, and I am going to confide an important secret to you."

"You may trust me, Dr. Alexander; for if there is anything in this world that I can do to save my friend from the dreadful fate you fear, you may command me to the extent of my ability," Miss Rainford returned, with deep feeling.

"Well, then," her companion resumed, "yesterday, after leaving Miss Arnold, I went directly to Rosemond, her former home, where I learned that about a year and a half ago—while you were traveling, it seems—she became engaged to a gentleman from this city. He proved untrue to her and has since married another. This disappointment or desertion,

I feel sure, is the root of all her present melancholy and critical state of mind."

"Dr. Alexander, you amaze me! I have never known anything of this!" Miss Rainford exclaimed, aghast. "If Marguerite has had trouble of this kind, she must have kept it entirely to herself."

"Yes, and that is what has wrought the mischief," said Reginald. "If she could only have confided her sorrow to some one and given free vent to her grief, it would have been far better for her. I would like to get her away from the city, if possible, for the man who deceived her is living here; but as I am a little fearful about proposing such a measure to her just at present, I want to ask you to see as much of Miss Arnold as possible during the next few weeks. We must arrange to keep her mind pleasantly occupied, so that she will not have time to brood over the past. If you could manage to drive with her a good deal, it would be the best thing for her. And now," Reginald continued, with some embarrassment, and flushing, "I am going to ask you to assist me in practicing a harmless deception. Miss Arnold knows me as Dr. Knox, which is my middle name, and I do not wish her to be undeceived regarding my identity."

Miss Rainford looked the surprise she experienced at this strange request, and wondered how her friend had been so misinformed.

Reginald felt very uncomfortable. He was naturally as frank and open as the day, and he began to feel as if he was liable to get himself into a most perplexing position if he continued his present relations with Miss Arnold.

He disliked very much to have Constance's name associated in any way with Marguerite's trouble, but Miss Rainford seemed like a noble and conscientious girl, and he suddenly resolved that he would deal in no half-confidences with her; he would trust her entirely.

"I see that you are surprised," he remarked, the flush deepening on his cheek, "and you will be still more so when you learn the reason—when I tell you that my brother-in-law is the man who deserted her to marry my sister."

"Mr. Southworth!" exclaimed Miss Rainford in undisguised astonishment.

"Yes, Noel Southworth. I was as completely staggered as yourself upon making the discovery, while what puzzles and disturbs me most is the fact that Miss Arnold's mania has assumed the form of a most violent hatred toward my sister."

"Dr. Alexander, you amaze me! I have not dreamed of anything like this! I had not a suspicion that Marguerite's condition was so alarming," Miss Rainford said, in a tone that proved her to be at last thoroughly aroused regarding her friend.

"You now understand why I do not wish her to know me as Dr. Alexander," Reginald returned. "She would lose confidence in me, and I could do her no good whatever."

He then went on to explain more at length Marguerite's feelings and condition, and so aroused his companion's interest and sympathies that she readily promised to aid him in any plan he might propose for the benefit of her friend.

"Of course," he remarked, as he arose to go, after discussing various ways and means, "this confession has been somewhat humiliating to me, for it so nearly concerns my sister, and has much depreciated my respect for her husband. But I must have help in my efforts to save Miss Arnold, and I felt that it was hardly doing you justice to withhold these facts from you."

"Thank you, Dr. Alexander; you may trust me fully," Miss Rainford heartily returned as she extended her hand to him.

"You will not forget that in Miss Arnold's presence I am Dr. Knox," he smilingly cautioned.

"I will not forget," she said, with an answering smile. "I will henceforth endeavor to keep you so well reminded of the fact that you will almost forget that you are known by any other name."

He thanked her again and then went away.

He visited Marguerite every day for a week after

that, and during that time the injury to her arm improved rapidly.

At times he felt greatly encouraged regarding her mental condition, then, upon other occasions, he would find her so depressed, so morbid and suspicious that he was almost in despair. One day, on going to visit her, he found the door ajar, and so entered without ringing.

He proceeded directly upstairs, as he was in the habit of doing, and as the door to Marguerite's sitting-room was also open, he came upon her suddenly, to find her bending, with contracted brow and gleaming eyes, over a book, which, as she caught the sound of his step, she instantly closed and tried to cover with her handkerchief. Reginald walked directly to her and gently took the volume from her lap. It was a work upon diseases of the brain by a noted specialist, and it fell open in his hands at the topic of "monomania," thus showing the subject upon which she had been so intent.

Marguerite colored violently, and, after one startled glance at her companion, quickly averted her glance.

"This is the book that you have been hiding from me from the day when I began my attendance upon you," Reginald gravely remarked.

She made no attempt to deny his charge, and he was greatly pained and disturbed.

He shut the book, laid it upon the table, and began to pace the floor, absorbed in anxious thought.

His fair patient watched him covertly for a while; she appeared to become strangely restless.

She suddenly arose, glided to his side, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Dr. Knox," said in a low, intense voice, "I can no more help thinking and reading about my trouble than the wind can help blowing. I know with what I am afflicted—I have monomania in an aggravated form. I am as sane upon every subject save one as you are; but in one respect I am mentally unbalanced, and I am aware that in one direction I am both cunning and—dangerous. You did not expect this confession from me," she went on, with a low laugh, as she caught the quick, anxious glance that he gave her, although he made no other sign to show how startled he was by that last admission, "but from the moment of our first meeting I have known that you suspected the truth. I read it in the way you studied my face in the car—the very glance of your eye told me at once that you were a physician, and it was the discovery of this which made me oblivious of everything, and hence my recklessness in alighting from the car. I wanted to escape from you and the horror which possessed me at the thought that strangers were beginning to read my condition. And yet, in spite of my first desire

to escape from your presence, when I awoke to consciousness in that drug store and found you bending over me, I was immediately inspired with a singular confidence in you—an instinctive feeling that somehow you were going to help me, and so I eagerly seized your offer to tend me. But a strange reticence has thus far prevented me from making an open confession; some influence has made me fear that if I once let go of myself—if I admitted the truth I should lose all further control of myself, and my doom would overtake me with fierce, swift strides. But it is useless for me to try to keep up the farce longer—you have discovered how I employ the time that I spend alone, and I may as well tell you that I am mad—I am dangerous—I am getting afraid of myself! Oh, Dr. Knox, can you—will you save me?"

She had spoken more and more rapidly, her hold tightening upon his arm until its clutch was absolutely painful.

Reginald Alexander was appalled by her words.

He had not thought that her disease had acquired quite such a hold upon her.

But he gave no sign of this. With the utmost calmness he turned and looked into that pleading, agonized face, a kindly sympathy in his own.

He gently removed her hand from his arm and

held it in both his, quietly stroking it and striving to relax the almost rigid and convulsed fingers.

"As I told you once before, I say again—I believe so," he replied to her eager appeal, and with a calm confidence which instantly had its effect upon her. "But," he added, with a gentle authority, "you must not deceive me in any way. You must open your whole heart to me. You must do nothing in secret which I forbid you—that book you must never open again. Will you promise me this?"

"I may promise, but the moment I am left to myself it will be forgotten. I have no power to resist the fascination which the subject possesses for me. It seems almost as if some demon must animate me and is driving me on toward a horrible precipice, where, the limit once passed, destruction awaits me," Marguerite responded, wildly.

Reginald possessed himself of her other hand, and by the magnetism of his strong will compelled her to something of calmness.

He saw that she was indeed upon the verge of a precipice—of a violent outbreak, and he was greatly exercised regarding what he should do for her.

While they stood thus, she leaned forward and whispered:

"You say I must open my whole heart to you. Perhaps if I do you will be able to exorcise this evil

spirit. Shall I tell you what haunts me continually —sleeping or waking?"

"Never mind that just now," he said, soothingly, knowing but too well what was in her mind, and thinking it best not to allow her to excite herself further. "I want to look at this arm, and then, if you feel inclined, I would like to take you to see a new picture that has just been hung in the Metropolitan Museum of Art——"

"Ha! ha!" she laughed out nervously. "Now you are treating me like a fractious and unreasonable child who must be diverted and amused; my mind must be turned from an exciting subject. But you are too late—you have unlocked the dungeon where my demon dwells, and I must let him forth for a season. Dr. Knox, his name is—Hate!"

She leaned nearer him, searching his face with eyes that blazed like two points of blue flame, while that last word was hissed out at him with an intensity that almost scorched his cheek as her hot breath came against it.

"Yes, hatred—fierce and ungovernable," she went on, "and of the sweetest woman in New York City—so sweet and lovely that I know that if I had met her under different circumstances I must have loved her; but now——"

She abruptly ceased, but the look which she flashed

into her companion's eyes sent a creeping horror through every nerve in his body.

Nothing of this appeared in his manner, however.

"You dislike this woman because of some wrong that she has done you," he quietly remarked.

"She has never wilfully wronged me," Marguerite replied, a trifle more calmly. I believe she does not even suspect that I have been wronged through her."

"Then, Miss Arnold, there can be but one explanation of the situation," Reginald said, thinking, since she had gone so far it might be just as well to at once probe to the bottom of her wound. "She must have married the man whom you—I—whom you expected to marry."

"Ha! how keen you are to read human nature!" she returned, searching his face suspiciously, but flushing hotly.

"I have had opportunity to study it pretty thoroughly," he calmly responded; then added, while he watched her closely: "I should suppose that you would have hated him instead of one innocent of wrong."

"No—I do not hate him," she said, musingly.

"May I ask you a very direct question, Miss Arnold?" Reginald inquired, with a heart-throb which startled him.

"You may ask me anything—I am making an

open confession," she returned, with a meekness that astonished him.

"Then—do you still love this man?"

"No," she said, thoughtfully. "I could not love a coward who deserted me without a word of explanation. I think I only feel contempt for him now. But the shock when I learned the truth, I do not know as I can make it quite plain to you"—a perplexed look clouding her face—"seemed to make everything within me stand still for a moment, then something snapped like a spring that has been too tightly wound, and ever since that demon has ruled me—driven me—lashed me—goaded me to——"

"Hush!" Reginald said, authoritatively, for she was becoming excited again, but a luminous smile swept over his fine face, and his heart was strangely light, in spite of the feeling of responsibility he experienced; "you are not to talk about this any more. You have told me all, and I thank you for your confidence. I believe it has helped you already—I believe it will enable me to treat you more intelligently. Now tell me one thing more—will you obey me in the future?"

"I—will—try," she said, but her eyes shifted uneasily beneath his glance.

"Then, to begin with, you are to come with me to see the picture of which I told you."

"Yes, I shall like to," she said, eagerly, and

speaking more naturally; then she added in a doubtful tone: "But I fear I ought not to monopolize your time."

"You're to 'obey,' you know," he smilingly returned, and without contesting the point further she excused herself and went to get ready to accompany him.

Reginald Alexander was very pale as the door closed behind her.

"Am I losing my senses?" he muttered under his breath. "What has become of my will-power—my reason—my judgment, that I should allow myself to love this unfortunate girl? for—I cannot blind myself to the truth—I am growing to love her with an all-absorbing affection."

He was greatly excited—he paced the floor with nervous, uneven steps. He reasoned with himself—he reproached himself for yielding to what was worse than folly, but all to no purpose, for, argue as he would against a union with one who had been so stricken mentally, between whom and the madhouse there was perhaps but a single step—he knew that the world would henceforth be a blank to him unless Marguerite Arnold could share his life.

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT

MARGUERITE did not keep Reginald waiting long. She was soon dressed for the street, and returned to him, looking so fair, though paler than usual from her recent excitement, that it did not seem possible that the taint of insanity could lurk behind that exquisite face.

She was very tastefully clad in a close-fitting suit of gray cloth, made perfectly plain, except for the buttons, which were of richly carved pearl. It was fastened at the throat by a knot fashioned from Roman gold, which was her only ornament. A charming little hat of gray velvet edged with a fold of pink and trimmed with pink-and-gray ostrich tips, crowned her head, while her hands were incased in gloves of undressed kid to match her suit. It was a strikingly elegant costume and vastly becoming to her.

"You have been very expeditious," Reginald remarked, with an appreciative smile and admiring eye.

"I was afraid you would become weary waiting for me," Marguerite gravely remarked. "I know that a physician's time is valuable."

The young man wished that he could make her smile just once; it was very sad to see her face so set and frozen, her beautiful mouth settled in such rigid lines.

"You are not to be troubled about that," he said, lightly. "I have not seen this picture yet myself, and I have been waiting to find some appreciative person to enjoy it and talk it over with me."

As they turned to leave the room he paused by the table, and taking up the book he had forbidden her to read, he asked in an offhand tone:

"Miss Arnold, will you kindly loan me this work?"

She glanced from him to the volume in his hand, a flush faintly tingeing her cheek.

"Certainly, if you wish," she quietly returned. Then she added in a slightly impatient tone as she drew her slender figure to its full height: "I am sure, Dr. Knox, I do not know how it is that you rule me so."

He smiled, but made no reply, and leading the way down to his carriage, he assisted her to enter it, and drove directly to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where they spent two delightful hours together.

Reginald Alexander had discovered one way to effectually distract Marguerite's thoughts from herself and her unhappy condition.

She was enthusiastically fond of art, and was able to converse both fluently and intelligently upon the subject. She was very discriminating in her judgment, dainty in her taste, and lofty in her choice of subjects, and Reginald felt that she had the soul of a true artist.

She was brighter and more cheerful than he had ever seen her as they drove back, but he sighed inwardly as he thought of her returning to the solitude of her lonely home.

As he bade her good-afternoon, however, he put a bright little book into her hands, saying:

"Read this, please, between now and my visit tomorrow, and then tell me what you think of it."

She lifted a pair of grateful eyes to him.

"How good you are to me, Dr. Knox," she said, adding, with a little sigh: "If I could have you for a constant monitor, I believe I could be very—good."

The man's heart thrilled with a strange happiness over her words, and he longed to fold her in his arms and tell her that he would gladly become the guardian of her life and watch over her with unwearied care. But, of course, he knew that such a proceeding would be very premature, even if it did

not result in creating an insurmountable barrier between them.

Several days passed, and she continued to be quite cheerful, even animated, at times; but this might have been owing partially to the fact that Nellie Rainford spent a great deal of her time with her.

She was getting to be quite frank in her manner toward Reginald, and seemed to be anxious to do whatever he suggested or desired for the re-establishment of her health.

He began to be quite hopeful and to build fair castles in the air for the future, when something occurred to show him how delusive had been this seeming rift in the clouds and to make him even more anxious than he had ever been.

A select *musicale* was to be given one evening by a friend of Nellie Rainford, and, thinking it might be just the thing to cheer and entertain Marguerite, that young lady gave her an invitation to accompany her, and was delighted to have it accepted.

She called early for her old schoolmate, and was surprised to find her more like her former self than she had been all winter, and quite anticipating the treat in store for her.

They reached the house where the *musicale* was to be given, and being a little early their hostess gave them some fine seats, and then sat down for a few moments' social chat with them.

After conversing upon various topics, Mrs. Felton remarked in a low tone, not wishing others to hear:

"I came very near having my evening spoiled, and was almost distracted, until about four o'clock this afternoon."

"How so?" Miss Rainford inquired.

"I had engaged Mlle. Adelbert to sing for me, and she was taken violently ill this morning. She sent me word immediately, and suggested one or two artists who might be able to supply her place. I started out at once to find them, and both were engaged. I was in despair, until it suddenly occurred to me that Mrs. Southworth, who, you know, charmed every one with her singing last winter, might be willing, under the circumstances, to help me out of my difficulty. She was just as sweet as she could be about it, and won my everlasting gratitude by consenting to come and sing in Mme. Adelbert's place. But there, I hear the signal, and I must run away to see if everything is all right. Good-by for an hour or so, when you must be sure to remain for a little sociability and refreshments."

The smiling and unsuspicious hostess tripped away, leaving Miss Rainford in a state almost bordering upon despair.

Constance Southworth, the one person whom Dr. Alexander dreaded to have Marguerite meet, the prima donna of the evening!

She was indeed a sweet and charming singer, although an amateur; but Nellie Rainford would have given worlds just then to have been safely back in Marguerite's sitting-room reading some interesting book to her.

A covert glance at her friend's face told her that she had not heard Mrs. Felton's account of her trials and the way she had overcome them, as that lady had spoken in a tone intended only for her own ear, and she felt somewhat relieved upon becoming assured of this.

What should she do? She felt as if she must get Marguerite away. Should she feign illness and beat a speedy retreat, taking the unsuspecting girl with her?

But no, it was too late for that, for even as she was planning this flight the curtain went up and the entertainment began, so that they could not leave without disturbing and annoying a great many people.

So, with the most distressing forebodings, she was forced to remain where she was and abide the result.

The first three or four selections were very fine, and Marguerite appeared to be much entertained, and was most hearty in her commendations of the various performers. Then there was a moment or two of delay, after which a beautiful woman, clad in pale yellow, with crimson roses on her breast,

came modestly forward upon the stage and was greeted with a burst of genuine delight.

She bowed her thanks, with a sunny little smile, and the next moment was filling the room with an answering burst of melody.

Miss Rainford ventured to glance at her companion, and instantly she forgot the existence of the lovely singer in the anxiety and horror which assailed her regarding Marguerite.

She was sitting motionless as a statue.

Her face was as white as if carved from marble—even her lips had not a vestige of color in them and were curled at the corners, something like those of a vicious dog just as he is ready to spring upon a foe, revealing the white teeth fiercely clenched beneath them.

Her eyes—ah, her eyes were simply terrible! Nellie had never seen them thus, and she was filled with horror.

Her brows were contracted and overhanging those great brown orbs, which were partially closed, but burning with a look of such deadly hate, with such a cunning, snaky-like gleam that Miss Rainford nearly cried out with fear, while she saw that they were fixed full upon the face of Constance Southworth.

She never moved once while the unsuspicious woman was singing; she scarcely seemed to breathe;

and when at last the song was finished and the fair warbler glided from the stage, her baneful gaze followed her until she disappeared from sight.

The audience were enthusiastic and seemed determined upon a recall, but the aria which Constance had sung was difficult, and as she was to give two more selections she did not respond to the encore.

But Miss Rainford could bear no more.

"Marguerite," she whispered, laying her hand upon her friend's arm, "I—I am afraid I shall faint if I sit here any longer. Will you mind coming out with me?"

Marguerite started, turned with an impatient jerk, and looked into her companion's face.

"Faint!" she muttered, with strange fierceness. "I don't wonder, after such unearthly sounds as we have just been listening to—they have nearly crazed me; they ring in my ears even yet and beat upon my brain like hammers. Do your high-toned Four Hundred call that singing? No, I shall not mind going out with you."

She arose as she spoke and swept from the room with a majestic air, looking neither to the right nor left until they entered their carriage.

Miss Rainford, who had taken her arm, was alarmed to feel, every now and then, a spasmodic shock or shiver run over her frame.

She would have been glad to dispatch a messenger

for Dr. Alexander, but feared that she might annoy Marguerite or arouse her suspicions by so doing, and she did not wish her to know that she had any fears regarding her mental condition.

She tried to chat upon various topics on their way home, but the strange girl made no reply and seemed to pay no heed to what she was saying.

"Come home and stay with me to-night, Marguerite," she said as they turned into Columbus Avenue, not far from her friend's residence. "We'll have a cup of hot bouillon and one of our old schoolgirl chats before we go to bed."

"No," Marguerite answered, briefly but decidedly.

Nellie could not think of leaving her alone in her present frame of mind, yet she dreaded spending the night with her, where there was no one but servants to call upon in any emergency.

However, duty seemed to point that way, and she laughingly told her that if she would not go with her she would remain in Ninety-seventh Street; she was not going home alone.

Marguerite made no response whatever to this arrangement, and although her silence seemed very inhospitable, Miss Rainford alighted when the carriage stopped and accompanied her to her room.

They both retired immediately, but neither slept. Miss Rainford lay very quiet, hoping that Marguerite would drop off into slumber after a time,

but she was very restless, and after tossing and turning for more than an hour, she arose, slipped on a flannel wrapper, and stole out into her sitting-room. Nellie followed, and saw her walking back and forth, muttering to herself and gesticulating in the most uncanny manner.

It was a horrible night, and one which Miss Rainford never forgot.

It seemed as if morning would never come and that those restless feet would never cease pacing. But just as dawn began to break Marguerite curled herself up on a lounge and fell into a heavy sleep, from which she did not awake until nearly eight o'clock.

She seemed quite like herself while she was dressing, and talked sociably during breakfast, but did not once refer to the affair of the previous evening.

But her friend was very uneasy about her in spite of this, for she did not look right about the eyes, while now and then she would stop in her conversation, appear to listen a moment, then resume what she had been saying.

She told her about her visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art with Dr. Knox, describing the pictures and statuary with great clearness and vividness.

She spoke of her calls upon and drives with the

poor little cripple, whom she now saw quite regularly and of whom she was becoming very fond—making of her, indeed, quite a *protégée*.

But even with this improvement in Marguerite, Miss Rainford felt far from confident that she was all right, and immediately upon finishing her breakfast, she pleaded an important engagement and took her leave.

She proceeded directly to the office of Dr. Alexander, whom she was fortunate enough to find there, and gave him an exact account of what had occurred at Mrs. Felton's the previous evening, and also of the horrible night she had passed with Marguerite.

He was greatly disturbed by what she told him.

"I am very sorry. I would not have had it happen for a great deal," he said, while anxious lines settled about his mouth. "All such exciting scenes throw her back. It is the most singular case I have ever known. She ought to be under the care of some skilful specialist. I wish she could go to Paris to be treated."

"Why do you not send her there?" Miss Rainford asked. "Truly, Dr. Alexander, I think she ought to be under constant surveillance. I do not believe it is safe to allow her to remain by herself. I am afraid she will do something very reckless."

"Paris is the place for her," Reginald thoughtfully remarked, "but, of course, I have no authority

over her, and I doubt if she could be persuaded to take such a journey with no friends to accompany her. But thank you, Miss Rainford, for coming to me so promptly. I will go around to see her directly."

The young lady went home somewhat relieved of her burden, but thoroughly wearied out from her sleepless night and the anxiety of mind which she suffered.

An hour later Reginald Alexander rang the bell of Marguerite's home and inquired for his patient. No, Miss Arnold was not at home, the servant informed him; she had dressed and gone out about half an hour previous.

This was unusual, for she seldom went out until after his daily visit.

"Did she go for a drive with any one?" he asked.

"No; she went alone and walked," the girl replied.

"Did she not say where she was going nor when she would return?" Reginald questioned, looking greatly disturbed.

"No, sir. I asked her, but Miss Margaret did not seem as well as usual this morning, and she answered me very sharply, then went away," and there were tears in the eyes of the faithful maid, who was very fond of her usually kind mistress.

Dr. Alexander waited to hear no more. He made

some reassuring reply to the girl, then turned abruptly, ran down the steps and sprung into his carriage.

His face was white, an anxious look gleamed in his eyes, and a terrible fear was struggling at his heartstrings.

"No. — Madison Avenue, and be quick about it," he briefly commanded the driver, and the next moment the carriage was dashing on its way toward the residence of Noel Southworth.

which apparently had so crushed her, she must have shone brilliantly in the social world.

"I am afraid you will think I have forgotten the chief object of my call, Mrs. Southworth," Marguerite remarked, suddenly cutting herself short in something she was saying, while her brilliant eyes were averted for a moment and she tapped restlessly upon the carpet with one small foot. "How heedless I am—and you are almost ill, too!"

"You have made me forget that you had any special object," Constance returned, with a light laugh. "I had forgotten, too, my own ill feelings."

"I was at Mrs. Felton's last evening and heard you sing," Marguerite remarked, the fire in her eyes beginning to blaze more fiercely, though it was half concealed by her drooping lashes.

"Were you?" said Constance, wondering if that had anything to do with the "object of her call." "Well, it was rather an impromptu affair on my part, for I had very short notice, and being somewhat out of practice, I was at first tempted to decline Mrs. Felton's request. But when I learned how she had been disappointed and what a failure her *musicale* was going to be unless she could supply Mlle. Adelbert's place, I had not the heart to do so. Therefore, although I knew I was a very poor substitute for Mlle. Adelbert, I resolved to do the best I could for Mrs. Felton."

"I am sure she must have been very grateful to you, and really, Mrs. Southworth, you sung exquisitely—your tones are very pure, and sweet, and flexible." What would Nellie Rainford have said if she could have heard Marguerite complimenting her thus in such a winning, dulcet voice! "I have called to inquire the name of your teacher, with a view to taking voice culture again myself."

"Oh, do you sing?" Constance inquired, surprised.

"I used to. My father was passionately fond of music, and was only too glad to give me all the advantages in that line that I would improve. What method did you study, Mrs. Southworth?"

"Well," said Constance, smiling, "my teacher, Signor Fontonelli, does not claim any particular method. He is one of those sensible, practical instructors who has gleaned the best points from various methods and adapts them to his pupils. The throats of all people are not constructed alike, and so with some the application of any one method would not develop certain tones that it might in others. Now, my throat is peculiarly constructed in some respects; for instance, under a former teacher there was a certain disagreeable metallic quality noticeable in some tones of the middle register, while all others were free from it.

"My teacher was conscious of it, and tried faithfully to eradicate it, but his method did not reach

the trouble. When I changed and went to Signor Fontonelli, he noticed it immediately and at once told me how to overcome it, while a very few lessons served to round out those tones and make them as pure and clear as the others."

"This is very interesting," Marguerite observed. "Did Signor Fontonelli explain to you how your throat differed from other pupils' or what caused that metallic quality?"

"Yes; when I opened my mouth as I had previously been taught, there seemed to be a defect in certain muscles right here—see?" and Constance placed her fingers on either side of her white throat, to indicate the position of the muscles referred to.

"Yes," said Marguerite, a tense eagerness in her voice as she hastily arose and seated herself on the sofa close beside Mrs. Southworth, as if to obtain a better view, while with rapid motions she unbuttoned her gloves and slipped them off.

"These muscles would contract instead of expanding as they ought," Constance resumed. "Well, Signor Fontonelli taught me a different way to open my mouth and how to carry the expansion back into my throat, so that the muscles would do the opposite thing—relax instead of contract. I do not think I can quite explain it, but I can readily experience the great advantage and ease of Fontonelli's system.

Even with my fingers I can feel the difference immediately."

Marguerite leaned nearer to the fair speaker, as if absorbed in what she was saying.

"How interested you are!" Constance remarked, smiling. "Do you see—do you catch my meaning?"

"Not—exactly," Marguerite returned, her eyes fastened with a strange look upon that smooth, milk-white throat.

"Well, then," continued her companion, so intent upon her subject that she forgot everything else for the moment, for her soul was full of music, "just place your fingers where mine are. I will open my mouth in the way to which I have been accustomed, and also according to the more scientific method advised by Fontonelli, and you will then understand just what I mean."

Marguerite hesitated for one brief instant, while a deadly pallor stole over her beautiful face; the next a demoniac light flashed into her eyes, and her white fingers covered the spot indicated by Constance.

"Oh, how cold your hands are!" she exclaimed, with a slight shiver. "There—opening my mouth in this way, you feel the muscles contract?"

"Yes."

"Now I change, and instantly you notice the difference."

"It is very perceptible," breathed Marguerite, bending still nearer and looking into the eyes of her companion, who, for the first time, caught the savage gleam, bent upon her. "What a beautiful, smooth, white throat you have, Mrs. Southworth—it is like ivory. It is very graceful and slender, too—so slender that—I think I could easily—choke you!"

Those last two words were hoarsely uttered in her ear with a fierceness impossible to betray, while the white, delicate fingers of the beautiful madwoman closed around Constance Southworth's throat like claws of steel.

Instantly she realized that she was in the power of a cunning and cruel maniac, and an expression of horror swept over her face.

"Ugh!" she cried in the effort to shriek for help, and struggling to free herself from that suffocating clutch.

But she might as well have tried to free herself from bands of iron that were operated by machinery with the mighty force of steam behind it.

It was a fearful moment—her last on earth, she believed, as she gazed into that beautiful demoniac face, while her senses were leaving her, and sent up a despairing appeal to Heaven for help and deliverance.

"Yes, a beautiful throat!" Marguerite went on, with a shrill laugh, which did not seem to belong

to a human voice, "but it will never again send forth sweet tones to beguile eager ears and to lure Noel Southworth with love songs and fond words—tones that won his heart from its allegiance to me and made him a traiter to his vows. Let me but once silence them, then perhaps these hammers that throb and beat upon my brain will be still, and this mocking demon that has haunted me day and night for so long will let me alone. You die hard, my pretty bride, but sleep will come to you soon—sleep that even Noel Southworth's kisses will fail to break. He will call you, but your lips will be mute—your ears deaf to his entreaties. He will weep—the world will be dark to him, perhaps, but what matter? The sun was blotted out for me long ago."

All this had been muttered rapidly in a thick, almost indistinct tone, while her clutch never once relaxed from the throat of her victim. It was a horrible moment! Constance had fallen back upon the sofa, struggling and writhing in helpless agony. Her mouth was open, her eyes almost starting from their sockets, her face fast growing purple from suffocation, while livid marks began to show themselves upon her tender flesh where those cruel fingers clutched her swelling throat so relentlessly.

She believed that she must die. There was no one near to help or save her, for every servant was

engaged with some duty, and she could make no sound to summon them. Ah! it was dreadful to die thus when she was so young and life so attractive! She caught those first few words that the mad girl had muttered about her beautiful throat, but the rest was lost in the ringing sound that filled her ears. Her sight grew dim, that pitiless, cruel voice grew fainter and fainter, until all was blank and she lost consciousness entirely.

One minute more and sweet Constance Southworth would have been beyond all human aid.

But a quick step came bounding up to the door of Noel Southworth's house. The door had fortunately been left ajar by the careless girl who had admitted Marguerite, and Reginald entered without having to ring and wait to be admitted.

His quick ear instantly caught the low mutterings of that mad voice within the reception room. He heard the struggles of the dying woman, who had not yet quite ceased her writhings, and in another instant he was beside them both, a sickening sense of horror and despair at his heart.

He seized the girl's white wrists in a viselike grasp, and commanded in a low, stern tone, though his face was as white as if he were dead:

"Marguerite, let go!"

A shock seemed to go through the girl from head to foot. The fierce, cruel light died out of her eyes,

and they wavered and fell before his masterful gaze.

Instinctively her fingers relaxed their hold, but oh! leaving such cruel prints where they had clung with such a relentless grip.

A shiver that made her teeth chatter swept over her, a moan of anguish rang through the room, and the next moment Marguerite Arnold sunk in a heap upon the floor at the young doctor's feet.

He let her lie there unheeded.

All his thoughts were centred on his sister.

He sprung to the bell, rang it sharply, and then bounded back to her side.

Presently the servant made her appearance, but cried out in horror as she caught sight of the two unconscious women, one upon the floor, the other upon the couch.

"Mattie," said Dr. Alexander as he gathered his sister's form in his arms, "lock the door of this room, put the key in your pocket, and follow me upstairs; but mind that you do not tell anybody what you have seen here."

He hurried up to Constance's chamber, laid her tenderly upon the bed, and then, assisted by the faithful Mattie, bent all his energies toward her restoration. His vigorous efforts were at length rewarded, and the sweet woman gradually returned

to consciousness and a remembrance of her dread experience.

She clung to her brother in terror.

"Oh, Reginald, save me—save me!" she moaned, as she gasped for breath and began to feel the blessed air circulating through her lungs once more.

"You are safe, my darling!" he breathed, tremulously, for now that he had won her back from the borders of eternity he was almost as much unnerved as herself. It was long before he dared to leave her, for the shock to her nervous system had been very great; but finally the quieting potion which he administered took effect, she slept, and then he went to look after his other patient in the room below.

She was still lying upon the floor in a semi-unconscious state, and he was glad that she had not come wholly to herself.

He did not wish her to recover and find herself in that house, if it could be prevented.

He knelt down beside her, poured a few drops of a reviving liquid between her lips, and in a few moments had the satisfaction of seeing her also sleeping heavily.

Then he lifted her from the floor and laid her in a comfortable position upon the sofa, after which he relocked the door and returned to Constance.

She was awake, but quiet, and doing better than he had dared to hope, but, of course, she was still

weak and unnerved, and he knew it would take some time for her to regain her strength.

Mattie was sitting beside her, and again Reginald cautioned her not to mention what she had seen, and insisted upon her promise that she would not.

"No one save Noel must know anything about it," he told his sister after he had sent the girl away; "it would create a great deal of excitement, and I do not want it talked about."

"But what does it mean, Reginald?" Constance inquired. "I cannot understand why Miss Arnold should come here to attack me, even if she is out of her mind. I am a comparative stranger to her, and it seems inexplicable that she should have conceived such a peculiar spite against me."

"There is no accounting for the freaks of mad people," he rather evasively replied. He saw that she did not know the truth and he resolved that she should not learn it if he could help it. "Miss Arnold has not been right in her mind for some time, and under my care, as you know, but I never thought she would become violent like this."

"What will you do with her now, Reginald? She ought to be put in some asylum immediately, where she can do no more harm," Constance remarked. "It is not save to have her at liberty."

The young physician grew very pale at this remark, and his lips trembled slightly as he responded:

"I will see that she is properly cared for, dear, and you need have no further fear of her."

He prepared some simple remedies for her, and gave explicit directions to Mattie about caring for her bruised and swollen throat, then he left her, promising to run in again in the course of three or four hours.

CHAPTER XV

MARGUERITE HAS A LONG ILLNESS

REGINALD ALEXANDER procured a carriage, into which he put Marguerite, who was still in a lethargic state, and took her directly to her own home.

She was borne up to her room, where she was put to bed, only partially rousing during the operation, then dropping off into a heavy stupor again.

"She is very ill," Dr. Alexander explained to her maid, Norah, a warm-hearted Irish girl, who appeared to be deeply attached to Marguerite. "She was making a call upon my sister when she fainted. You are to watch her very closely and admit no one to see her. If she should show signs of arousing before I come again, give her six pills from this bottle; if they should not quiet her, in twenty minutes give her six more. Be sure to do exactly as I tell you and I will return as soon as I have attended to another patient."

From Marguerite's Reginald went immediately to Noel Southworth's office.

He found him alone and briefly related to him what had occurred.

The man was shocked—horrified, upon learning how near he had come to losing his wife in such a tragic manner.

"That is not the worst part of it, either," Dr. Alexander concluded, sternly. "You know and I know that you alone are responsible for it all."

"What in thunder do you mean?" Noel Southworth demanded, with a start, and changing color at this unexpected charge.

"It is not necessary for me to enter into any explanation. All I need to tell you is that I have had Miss Arnold under my care for some time, and in order to treat her intelligently I went to Rosemond, interviewed her old physician, and—learned her whole history!"

"Well?" questioned his companion, assuming a defiant tone, but with a guilty flush, and Reginald resumed, relentlessly:

"I know who won her affections and then heartlessly deserted her for another—I am aware of the cowardly reason that actuated the man. I know that neither grief for the loss of her parents nor long-continued care and watching broke the heart and shattered the reason of this peerless girl, and so I tell you that you are responsible for the wreck she is to-day. I tell you, too, that you would also have

been responsible for the murder of your wife if I had not opportunely come to the rescue."

"Good heavens! Stop, Reginald! You are enough to drive a man wild with such wholesale denunciations!" Noel Southworth exclaimed, with a shudder.

"Tell me truly one thing," the young man continued, with increasing sternness; "did you really love my sister, or if some newer, fresher and richer beauty had happened to strike your fancy, would you not have deserted her as you did Marguerite Arnold?"

Noel's eyes wavered beneath the austere glance of his brother-in-law, and his face crimsoned to the roots of his hair.

"I know that I acted like a fool regarding that affair," he admitted with an air of conscious shame; "but as true as I live, Reginald, I love Constance with my whole heart."

"I am rejoiced to hear it," his companion returned with curling lips, "even though the fact does not in the least help Miss Arnold's case. I am free to confess, however, that recent revelations have tended to make me lose confidence in you, and I am impressed that there is an element of weakness and instability in your character that is liable to cause my sister unhappiness in the future. I have a word of caution for you, however. If you would not ruin her life at the outset, do not allow her to suspect the truth. Make her as happy as you can, but never

reveal to her how you won and deserted Marguerite Arnold, if you can avoid doing so."

"I am not anxious to have her know anything of that story," the young husband muttered, moodily.

"As soon as Constance is sufficiently recovered from this shock," Reginald continued, "I should advise a change of scene. A trip to California would be very beneficial."

"All right—she shall have it," Noel responded, with an eagerness which betrayed that he would not be averse to making the trip himself, and thus put the continent between him and the woman whom he had wronged. "But," he added, uneasily, "what are you going to do with that mad girl? I shall not know a moment's peace until I hear that she has been put where she can do no further harm."

A spasm of pain swept over the young doctor's face.

"I have not yet decided just what will be best for her," he replied after a moment of thought. "I believe that upon every other subject save that of her singular hatred of Constance she is as sane as either you or I. I feel—unless this outbreak to-day should wholly unsettle her mind—that if she should never meet either of you again she would entirely recover after a time."

"Well, I'll give her the opportunity," Mr. Southworth resolutely returned. "I will take Constance

away as soon as she is able to go, and you shall have a chance to prove whether your theory is correct. But," he added, flushing, "I think it is rather hard that you should so condemn me, Reginald. I meant to do the fair thing by Marguerite, but when I found out about her birth—I suppose you know about that?"

"Yes."

"Well, I couldn't quite stand that, you know. A fellow wants his wife to be above reproach——"

"Marguerite Arnold is above reproach," Reginald sternly interposed.

"Yes, of course, as far as her personal character is concerned," Noel admitted. "But one wouldn't exactly like to have it thrown at him that she wasn't——"

"I understand you," said Reginald, coldly and with curling lips, as his brother-in-law stammered and stopped. "Of course no breath of scandal must touch the immaculate name of Southworth, even though it cost the happiness and reason of a pure and lovely girl to preserve it, not to mention the broken vows and cowardly desertion on your part."

"Hang it, Reginald, you surely would not have had me go back and marry the girl after I had discovered that I loved your sister, and then live to regret it all my life!" the young man exclaimed with angry impatience, for it was no light thing to

him to feel that he had forfeited the respect of his wife's brother, whom he had always greatly admired.

"I shall not presume to pass judgment upon you save in my own mind," Dr. Alexander gravely returned. "You know to what extent you have sinned and how far you are responsible for the present state of things," and having said this he took his hat and left the office.

Noel Southworth carried a very sore heart in his bosom during the remainder of that day, and for many days afterward, while every time he looked at those livid marks upon his wife's throat he was filled with horror and something of a sense of personal guilt.

Twice after leaving the office of his brother-in-law Reginald visited Marguerite.

The first time he found her under the influence of the sleeping potion he had prescribed, and he hoped that a long, quiet rest might do much for her. But the second time he found her awake and feverish and inclined to be delirious.

This alarming condition indicated an illness that would be somewhat protracted; therefore on the following morning Reginald secured a competent nurse.

For three long weeks Marguerite hovered between life and death with brain fever, but good

nursing and skilful practice won the day in the end, and she began to come slowly back to life and health.

She was very gentle, patient and obedient during her long convalescence, but there were times when Reginald thought that some anxiety was pressing heavily upon her mind.

She had shown nothing of her mania since her delirium left her, and he began to hope that this illness had been the climax of her trouble.

One day, when she was able to sit up, the nurse excused herself from the room soon after he came in, to attend to some duty elsewhere, thus leaving the young doctor and his patient alone together for the first time during her illness.

"I am beginning to be impatient of my long confinement," Marguerite remarked as she glanced wistfully from the window. "I should like to get out into the fresh air and sunshine for a while."

"Be careful for another week, and then I think you may venture out," Dr. Alexander returned, smiling.

"Can I? That is even better than I dared to hope," said Marguerite, with evident pleasure. Then she asked: "What has become of my little *protégée* during these long weeks?"

"Poor little girl!" said Reginald. "She has missed you sadly and been very anxious about you, but she is better and able to go out now every day. Several

ladies, Miss Rainford among them, have interested themselves in her, so she has been well cared for, although no one is quite like her first love, her 'dear Miss Arnold.' "

Marguerite actually smiled faintly at this account of her little friend's regard for her.

"It is pleasant to be missed, even by a little cripple like Amy," she remarked. Then, with a long-drawn sigh and a quick, searching glance at her companion, she asked: "Haven't you some news to tell me, Dr. Knox? What has happened since I have been shut up here?" and an anxious look leaped into her eyes as she awaited his reply.

He knew instantly of what she was thinking. She wanted to know the result of her terrible interview with Constance. He had hoped that her severe illness had obliterated all remembrance of it from her mind, but it seemed it had not, yet he wondered at her apparent indifference regarding it.

"Well, let me see," he said, assuming a thoughtful air and resolving to be very wary. "Doctors are very busy people, you know, and are not supposed to keep well posted about society matters, but perhaps I can give you a few items of interest. The first that comes to me is the engagement of Miss Adele Hubbard and Mr. Karl Heilburn; they are to be married in June. The Websters sailed on the 25th for Europe, where the Misses Webster

are to remain a year, studying music. The Southworths have gone to California, and——"

"What do you say? the Southworths have gone to California!" Marguerite interrupted, with trembling lips and in a scarcely audible tone.

"Yes."

"When?" she breathlessly demanded.

"Um—I am not good at remembering dates," mused Reginald, "but I believe it was the 19th."

"The 19th! Why—and I was—taken ill the 15th—that was only four days after," said Marguerite, looking greatly perplexed.

"That is very good subtraction," Reginald smilingly remarked, yet not fully comprehending her meaning.

"Are—are you sure that Mrs. Southworth went?" she inquired, without heeding his attempt at pleasantry.

"Yes, certainly, Mrs. Southworth accompanied her husband."

"It—is—very—strange!" murmured Marguerite.

"Strange? It does not strike me there is anything unusual in the circumstance," Reginald replied. "Quite a number of people have gone on a Raymond excursion—that is, it was a select private party under a Raymond conductor, and the Southworths were of the number."

"Dr. Knox, will you please tell me just how I

was taken ill? I—I cannot distinctly remember," Marguerite said, while she put her hand to her head as if trying to recall something.

Reginald's heart leaped within him, and his cue was instantly taken.

"Why, certainly," he answered in a matter-of-fact tone. "Doubtless you remember that Miss Rainford spent the night with you after your return from some entertainment. On the way home the next morning she stopped at my office and said that you were not at all well—you had not slept during the night, and she begged that I would drop in early to see you. I did so, and found you very ill—so ill that you did not recognize me."

Marguerite had watched him with breathless attention during this explanation.

"And Miss Southworth started only four days later for California," she muttered.

"Yes, it seems so. But what can that have to do with your illness?" Reginald inquired, with well-assumed surprise.

"Was she—well when she started?" Marguerite questioned, with averted eyes and without heeding his inquiry.

"I saw the party off, and to all appearances Mrs. Southworth was looking forward with as much pleasure to her trip as any other member of the company," Reginald quietly responded.

"It is very strange," Marguerite repeated, putting both hands up to her temples, "and—and I believe I must have had a very vivid and terrible dream about her."

Again Reginald's heart leaped. If he could only confirm her in this belief, it would be a great victory gained.

"A dream?" he echoed, to draw her out still further.

"Yes," she said, thoughtfully. "I do not seem to remember very distinctly anything that occurred after Nellie and I came home that evening from Mrs. Felton's *musicale*. We had heard Mrs. Southworth sing and were so—so disappointed in her. I got nervous, Nellie nearly had a fainting turn, and so we came home. Since then everything has been in a jumble. I seemed to be studying music in which Mrs. Southworth was mixed up in some strange way; then I thought—I must have dreamed—that she was—dead," she concluded, the old look of repressed hate leaping to her eyes as she muttered that last word in a whisper.

"Delirium plays strange freaks with people sometimes," Reginald quietly remarked, "but Mrs. Southworth is living and well. An account in one of yesterday's papers stated that the party were in Pasadena, and at a grand ball given at the Raymond

I feel that a certain germ of evil within me has not been wholly eradicated."

"I know it," Reginald gravely returned, "and hence my proposition. I want you to have an entire change—I want you to put yourself under the care of a noted specialist. Will you?"

"To whom do you refer?" Marguerite asked.

"Dr. Marton, of Paris, one of the finest brain specialists in the world."

Instantly she shrunk as if in sudden pain.

"Leave New York—go to Paris—go abroad alone! Oh! I could not do that!" she cried in a startled tone.

"No, not alone. I never thought of allowing you to do that," Reginald returned in a low, tender tone, an inexpressible yearning in the look that he bent upon her; "and pray do not be shocked or startled by what I am about to say to you; but, Marguerite, would you go with me to Paris? Hush! wait," he continued, with gentle authority, as she flashed an amazed look at him and a vivid color swept up to her brow. "I ask you to go as *my wife!* I love you, Marguerite—I—I began to love you at the very beginning of my attendance upon you, and my affection has grown and strengthened until it has absorbed my whole being—until I feel that I cannot live without you. Of course I desire to have your health permanently re-established, and I firmly

believe than an entire change, a sea voyage, congenial companionship, and a year's treatment from Dr. Marton would result in your complete restoration. Will you go to Paris with me as my wife, Marguerite?"

She turned and searched his face for a moment with an earnest, penetrating look.

"Dr. Knox, I am more astonished than I can express!" she cried. "Would you be willing to marry me when you know that the germ of insanity lurks within me?"

"Not only willing, but glad, Marguerite. I want you just as you are—I want to devote my life to you, for I love you, and I believe that the time is not far distant when you will be safe and happy once more," was the earnest reply.

"But—but I do not love you," Marguerite faltered; "at least, not as a wife ought to love. I have learned to regard you as a very dear friend—I honor and esteem you more than any man I know, but love! I told you that I had loved once——"

"Yes," said Reginald, with lips that trembled slightly, "but surely you cannot love that man now——"

"No, and I am afraid no other," she interposed in a bitter tone. "I believe the power to love has been killed within me, and I feel that I should

do you an irreparable wrong if I should accept your proposal."

"I know that you do not love me, Marguerite; that is the one thorn that gives me pain," Reginald said, sadly. "I did not expect, after what you had told me, that you could readily transfer your affections to me. But for the present we will leave that question entirely out of our discussion. I simply ask you to give me the right to accompany you to Paris—to watch over you and devote myself to your recovery. Oh, Marguerite, do not deny me this. My heart is set upon it, and if I am satisfied to have it so why cannot you yield to me?" he concluded, a mighty yearning in his voice.

"And give up your practice here? That would be too much of a sacrifice," she faltered.

"It would be no sacrifice, dear. To be sure, I have a fine practice here, but a year's absence would not seriously affect it. I could easily work it up again. Besides, it would give me an opportunity which I have long wanted—a year of study in the hospitals of Paris."

Marguerite was silent for several minutes, during which she appeared to be absorbed in considering his proposal.

At last she gravely remarked:

"My friend, I will go to Paris, and, as you have suggested, put myself under the care of this noted

specialist. But I will take a competent nurse and companion along with me. I cannot allow you to ruin your life for me. I know it would not be right for you to hamper yourself in the way you have proposed and sacrifice your brilliant future in so unpromising a cause."

"Marguerite, I will not take that as your ultimate decision," Reginald returned in a pained, passionate tone. "You would get low-spirited and homesick to go abroad in any such way, and that would be worse for you than not to go at all. But even if you persist in it, I shall follow you to Paris, for the sake of being near you; I could not live and be content with the ocean dividing us. But tell me truly," he added, bending nearer to search her face, "would you be unhappy to be bound to me—would my constant companionship be irksome to you?"

"No," she said, lifting her trustful eyes to him. "I am happier with you than with any one else—we are congenial upon so many points—and I should be unhappy only in fearing that you might be disappointed in me and some time regret your choice."

"I shall never regret it," Reginald cried, eagerly, "and since you say you have no love to give me, I will not annoy you with a lover's ardent demonstrations. We will simply be good comrades, as we are now; only give me the right to shield you with

my name and care. Marguerite, I must go with you."

"Let me think of it for a few days——" Marguerite began.

"Nay, dear, let it be settled here and now," Reginald interposed, imploringly; "for whatever your decision may be, mine will be unalterable; if you go to Paris, I go also. I could not live and not know from day to day whether you were getting better or worse. Ah, Marguerite, you have told me that you would not be unhappy with me as your companion. I believe you would even be cheerful and content to share my life."

"Yes," she murmured, with a yearning sigh. "I feel very content when I am with you—very safe; somewhat as I should suppose an orphan girl might feel toward an elder brother."

"Then let me be that elder brother," her companion pleaded, eagerly. "I promise you that I will be all that you could desire as such; and if you can never look upon me in any other relation I will not annoy you with vain regrets or irksome avowals. Only, of course, you know that I must have the right to claim you as my wife before the world."

"Yes, I know. But, Dr. Knox, could you be content with any such arrangement? I feel that you are offering me a great deal with the prospect of

receiving but very little in return. It does not seem fair," Marguerite said, uneasily.

"Yes, I will be content—only grant my wish," he answered, and he believed then what he said.

"It would be very pleasant to travel with you," Marguerite went on, musingly. "Our tastes are alike in many respects—we enjoy the same books and authors, we are both enthusiastic upon art and music, and—and——"

"And what, Marguerite?" he asked as she hesitated.

She lifted her eyes to him and flushed.

"I am afraid you will think me very selfish," she said, the ghost of a smile flitting over her beautiful lips, "but it would be so delightful to have such a kind, true friend to lean upon—it would be so restful to be taken care of."

"Then you will come with me, dear?" Reginald said, with almost boyish eagerness.

"If——"

"There is to be no 'if' about it," he said, decidedly. "It must be either yes or no, now, Marguerite."

"Yes, then, and—I am very grateful to you," she said, tremulously.

"You are never to speak of gratitude to me," Reginald interposed, tenderly, his face luminous, for just then he was sanguine enough to believe that even-

tually he should win this beautiful woman, heart and soul, for himself. "You are not to feel that any special obligation rests upon you. You are to be as free in every respect as you are to-day, except that I shall plan and bear all care for you. And now," he added, smiling, "I am not going to give you time to change your mind. The *Scythia* sails next Wednesday, and I shall go this afternoon to secure our passages on her."

"So soon," breathed Marguerite in a startled tone.

"It will be none too soon," said Reginald, lightly.

"But how can you arrange to leave your practice in so short a time?"

"Marguerite," said the young man, gravely, "I have had this project in mind for many weeks and have been laying my plans accordingly. I have arranged to leave my patients in the care of a skilful physician in case I should decide to go abroad for a year's study, so that I have very little, comparatively, to do to complete my preparations."

"You are very thoughtful—you are very masterful, Dr. Knox," Marguerite remarked in a wondering tone.

Reginald smiled and secretly hoped that the future would prove her statement true. If he could but master the blight that had so marred her life, if he could but teach her dead heart to love again, he would be happy indeed.

But he only said in a slightly reproachful tone:

"Am I to be Dr. Knox to you always, Marguerite? Cannot you call me Reginald now?"

"Yes, indeed, I would like to, if I may," she responded, with charming candor, and his face lighted at her ready acquiescence.

"Thank you. Now, will six days give you time enough to make your arrangements for leaving New York?" he asked.

She thought a moment, then said:

"Yes. As far as my personal arrangements are concerned, I could be ready in even less time. If it were not for my house——"

"That difficulty can be easily overcome if you think favorably of another proposition which I am about to submit to you," Reginald remarked. "I have a friend who was married last October. He has been boarding with his wife at the Gilsey House since then, but both are very weary of hotel life, and only last week he asked me if I knew of a furnished house in a good locality which he could lease for a year or longer."

"That would be a very nice arrangement," said Marguerite, eagerly, "and perhaps they would like the servants also. They are very reliable and faithful, and it would be a comfort to me to know that they would not be thrown out of employment by this sudden change in my life."

"No doubt they would like to retain them. Shall I tell Nichols that he may bring his wife around to look at the house?" Reginald inquired.

"Yes, if you please, Reginald."

"Thank you, dear," the young man said in a tone that thrilled with sudden tenderness at this first effort to use his Christian name.

"And now"—more gravely—"my plan is this. The *Scythia* will sail at noon on Wednesday. At ten I will come to you with my pastor, the Rev. Dr. Denning, unless you prefer some one else. I merely suggest this to save you all possible care. I will also invite Miss Rainford and her *fiancé,* Mr. Brooks, to be present, if you like. Will these arrangements please you?"

"Yes, indeed. How kind and thoughtful you are. Oh, Reginald, are you sure that you will never regret this step?" Marguerite cried, with sudden misgivings.

"You are not to borrow trouble over that," he fondly answered. "I have won your promise and I am more than content—I am unutterably happy. Now, Marguerite," he continued, as the carriage stopped before her door, "I positively forbid you—excuse the expression, but I am using a physician's authority now—to weary yourself with any laborious preparations. Just have Norah pack your trunks with whatever you may need to make you comfort-

able during the voyage, and we can easily supply any deficiencies when we arrive in Paris. One thing more," he added. "As you happen to think of matters which may need attention before we leave, make a memorandum of them and let me save you all the trouble that I can. Now, dear, promise me that you will not worry over anything, real or imaginary, but begin from this moment to work toward the accomplishment of our mutual desire—the restoration of your health."

"I will try, truly," Marguerite responded, heartily, and deeply touched by his thoughtfulness.

After they had returned from the park and Reginald had accompanied her to the door of her own residence, he re-entered the carriage with the light of a great joy gleaming in his eyes, a tender smile on his lips.

"I will win her," he murmured. "I believe she will yet learn to love me. I wonder," he went on, his face clouding slightly, "if I am doing right in keeping the truth regarding my relationship to Constance a secret from her? Am I justified in marrying her under the name of Dr. Knox and allowing her to believe that will be her name? I would not wrong her by so much as a thought, yet I dare not tell her the truth. I am still afraid I should lose my influence over her if she should learn it. Still, I want to do what is right. I believe I will have a

confidential talk with the Rev. Dr. Denning and abide by his advice in the matter."

Accordingly, later in the day, he sought his pastor and gave him a history of Marguerite's case, his own opinion regarding it, and confided to him his future plans, and concluded by asking him if he thought he would be justified in keeping the fact of his relationship to Constance from her until her health should be fully re-established.

The reverend doctor looked very grave over his communication, and it was some time before he made any reply to it. At last he said:

"My young friend, I feel compelled to speak very plainly to you. In the first place, I think you are taking a great risk in uniting yourself to one who is so strangely afflicted. Still, if you believe that she can be cured——"

"I do firmly believe it," Reginald here broke in; "that is, under certain conditions, I am confident that if she can have an entire change—if life can be made easy and pleasant for her, she will yet be a well woman; while I also know that if I should give her up and leave her to live as she has been living during the past year and a half, she will shortly be beyond all human aid."

"Then you, of course, believe it to be your duty to save her at any cost," said his companion, regarding him with a sympathetic glance.

"Assuredly," Reginald returned, flushing, "and loving her as I do, I am not only willing but glad to devote myself to her. The only question that troubles me is—am I justified in withholding the fact that my surname is Alexander?"

"Under ordinary circumstances, I should tell you that deception of any kind is never justifiable," his pastor thoughtfully replied; "but since you assure me that you truly love Miss Arnold and have only her welfare at heart, since I consider, too, that you are making no light sacrifice yourself for her sake, I really can see no sin in withholding your surname from her for a time. Of course, your certificate of marriage will have to be made out with the full name of both parties; but as I utter only the Christian name when performing the ceremony, Miss Arnold need know nothing about it, as you can take care that she does not see the document afterward until you are ready to show it to her. And yet I wish that you did not feel that any reservation is necessary," the good old man concluded, with a sigh.

"I wish so, too, with all my heart," said Reginald, "but I do believe if I should tell her the truth it would revive the wretched events of the past—she would drift back into the old melancholy, and that in less than three months she would be in a madhouse, past all help."

"Very well, then. I will cheerfully assist you to the extent of my ability, for I believe that you are entirely conscientious in the matter," the clergyman replied, and after thanking him heartily, Reginald went about other duties with a light heart and an easy conscience.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WEDDING OF MARGUERITE

THE six days previous to the sailing of the *Scythia* seemed very short to Marguerite.

In spite of the fear that would occasionally arise in her mind that perhaps she was not doing just right in allowing Reginald to sacrifice himself to a loveless bride, she looked forward to the approaching change in her life with more eagerness and anticipation than she had supposed possible for her to ever experience again.

She thoroughly respected and admired the man whom she was going to marry. She was very grateful to him for the incalculable good that he had already done her, and she resolved that she would strive in every possible way to make his life as pleasant as might be. Love him as maidens usually love the men whom they are to wed she did not, and she believed she never could. It seemed almost as if that element in her nature had been paralyzed by the terrible shock experienced on learning that the man she had loved was a traitor; but a loyal friendship

and all that was best within her besides she would give him most cordially.

Miss Rainford had been taken into the confidence of the young doctor, and while she also thought that he was making a great sacrifice without the promise of much in return, she gave him her most hearty sympathy and co-operation in his plans.

She spent most of the time between the betrothal and the wedding with her old schoolmate, and was both rejoiced and quite hopeful over the marked change for the better which she perceived in her.

She thoroughly enjoyed helping Marguerite to put her house in order and prepare for her journey and the simple wedding that would precede it.

Dr. Alexander's friend was only too glad to take a lease of her beautiful home, and that matter having been easily adjusted, the new tenants were to take possession immediately after the departure of the young couple.

It was a very quiet and unpretentious wedding that occurred in Marguerite's pretty parlors on the morning of the 9th of February, and though the fair bride was grave and evidently impressed with the importance of the step that she was about to take, she was far from being unhappy.

She was charming in her simple but elegant traveling dress of gray broadcloth, with hat and gloves to match, and no one would have suspected for a

moment that she had ever been the victim of any mental disorder.

The good clergyman could scarcely believe that any such trouble existed, as he marked her sweet graciousness of manner and the gentle dignity with which she conducted herself throughout the ceremony.

"She is a rarely beautiful and cultured woman," he said to himself as, after the marriage service was over, he saluted her and chatted with her for a few moments. "It is no wonder that young Alexander loves her and is determined to have her at any cost. Heaven grant that he may succeed and that the union may be a happy one."

Miss Rainford and her *fiancé,* Mr. Brooks, accompanied the young couple on board the *Scythia* to see them comfortably settled for the voyage.

Nellie made herself very helpful to Norah—whom, at Reginald's suggestion, Marguerite had decided to take with her as maid—in arranging everything as snugly and pleasantly as possible in Mrs. Knox's stateroom, which adjoined the one assigned to the doctor.

The devoted husband's care and forethought were here manifest in many ways, for every comfort and luxury had been provided for Marguerite's use during the voyage.

"With such a husband you certainly ought to be

a very happy woman," Miss Rainford remarked to the young bride while she was helping to stow away in a compact yet convenient manner these evidences of Reginald's thoughtfulness, "and I shall expect the most glowing letters—at least one a month, remember, Marguerite—extolling his many virtues."

"I am not indifferent to Reginald's virtues, I assure you, Nellie," the young wife gravely returned. "I think he is the grandest man I ever knew, unless it was my father."

"And yet you do not love him?" inquiringly remarked Nellie, regarding her with a wondering look.

"No; not as you love Walter Brooks, Nell. Your face tells me you regard this as a heartless confession. I wish that I could love Dr. Knox," she added as a troubled look swept over her face. "He certainly deserves the truest affection that a good woman is capable of giving; but, dear, I believe the power of love has been taken from me. My heart is a dead, cold thing—a burned-out cinder, I sometimes think. But, aside from that, I can most heartily yield Reginald all that is best within me—a thorough appreciation of his noble qualities, admiration for—yes, and pride in his skilfulness as a physician, together with the deepest gratitude for his goodness and devotion to me."

"Well, then, mark my words, my dear Mrs. Dr. A—Knox—Miss Rainford came very near making

an irreparable blunder just then—"if you can give your husband all that now, the rest will come by and by! Your heart 'a burned-out cinder,' indeed! I don't believe a word of it."

"I wish, for Reginald's sake, that your prophecy might prove to be a true one," Marguerite responded, with a regretful sigh, which seemed to indicate that she had no faith in it.

Their conversation was here interrupted by the appearance of the gentleman, who had come to ascertain if their arrangements were completed and to tell them that it was nearly time for the signal to go ashore to be sounded.

They all went on deck, where, after hearty farewells and good wishes for a pleasant voyage, Mr. Brooks and his betrothed went ashore, and soon the stately steamer swung out into the harbor and the newly-wedded couple were fairly launched upon their ocean voyage, as well as upon the voyage of life.

The weather was very mild for winter and from the moment of starting the fresh, keen sea air seemed to invigorate Marguerite, until she appeared almost like a new creature.

She had not the slightest symptom of seasickness, and wrapped in her long seal cloak, warm hood and gloves, she appeared to delight in being on deck, drinking in health and strength with every breath.

Reginald, on the contrary, was very ill for three days, but though he insisted that he could do very well by himself and begged Marguerite to give herself no uneasiness on his account, he found her a very kind and faithful nurse. She would not leave him long at a time, but vibrated between the deck and his stateroom, insisting that it was her right to care for him, and she should not surrender it to a steward, as he begged her to do; while in spite of his wretched condition physically, it was a perfect delight to him to see how her eyes had brightened and how her cheeks were glowing with returning health and vigor.

On the afternoon of the fourth day he was able to be helped on deck, where he found it was sunny and pleasant.

He began to feel better immediately, and, wrapped to the chin in warm rugs, he lay back in his steamer chair and watched his wife, who was pacing back and forth near him, evidently enjoying to the utmost the boundless sea with its white-capped waves, the pure, keen air, and the motion of the bounding vessel.

"How beautiful she is!" he thought, and his heart exulted in the possession of her.

Whenever she turned in her pacing she would glance over at him and nod brightly if she caught his eye, then as she came back to his side would

often ask if she could do anything to make him more comfortable.

Once she thought that he was not muffled quite closely enough, and as she was passing him she stopped to tie his scarf more securely about his throat.

She had removed her gloves to do this, and as her white hands fluttered about his face Reginald could not resist the impulse to lean forward and touch his lips fondly to one of them.

Instantly all the bright color fled from Marguerite's cheeks, a startled look of pain leaped into her eyes, and her lips settled into tense, hard lines.

She drew back from him, standing straight and white before him as she slowly put on her gloves, while she coldly remarked:

"When you are weary of sitting here, Reginald, I will ask the steward to come to help you below again."

She turned away without waiting for any reply, and resumed her pacing, but the elasticity was all gone from her step, the brightness from her face, while she seemed sad and preoccupied.

Reginald was deeply wounded that she should have shrunk so from the simple caress, while he also reproached himself for having taken such a liberty—if the mere kissing of his wife's hand could be called a liberty.

His act had been one of impulse, prompted by

tenderness and gratitude for her faithful care of him and the many thoughtful attentions she was continually bestowing upon him, and it cut him keenly that she should have been offended by it.

"I promised, I know, that I would not annoy her by expressions of affection," he muttered, "but I love her so—she is so sweet and attractive that I forgot myself. Why did she resent it, I wonder? Ah," he continued, with a start and a frown, "can it be that the act reminded her of the caresses of that traitor? If so, I will never offend in the same way again."

This was the only explanation of her conduct that he could think of, but it was small consolation to him, and he felt unhappy and depressed over the incident.

Marguerite did not come to him again for some time, but she finally appeared to notice how quiet he had grown, and approaching him, asked if he would like to go below.

Yes, he was ready, he said, and she immediately went to find a steward to assist him.

After he was comfortably settled in his berth, she came into his stateroom without her wraps, a book in her hand.

"I have found a bright little thing, Reginald, among a package of books that Nellie put up for me," she remarked as she sat down beside him, "and

I want to read you some extracts from it—that is, if you are not too tired to listen."

He looked up and smiled, greatly comforted to have her come to him in this friendly way after her recent coldness.

"No, indeed, Marguerite, I shall be delighted to listen to you, and you are very good to think of me," he heartily returned. She at once opened the volume and read for an hour, stopping every now and then to make some appreciative remark or to discuss with him some interesting point. When it grew too dark to read she put the book away and they chatted sociably until the gong sounded for dinner.

"I wish you were able to go to dinner with me, Reginald," Marguerite wistfully remarked as she arose. "I am lonely without you."

His heart leaped at her words; then sunk heavily again as he told himself that they meant nothing more from her than the remark of one friend to another.

"I hope I shall be to-morrow," he answered. "It must be very unpleasant for you to go among all those people alone."

"If you think that you could sit up, Reginald, I will ask the steward to bring a table and tray in here, and we can have our dinner together. I think I

could help him arrange it so that it would be very cozy."

"I am afraid it would be too much trouble for you," he objected, yet longing to have her carry out her little plan.

She looked gravely into his eyes a moment, then said, with a gentle sweetness that touched him deeply:

"Nothing is too much trouble, Reginald. I wish you would believe it and let me do more for you. May I have our dinner brought here?"

"Yes. I should enjoy it very much," he answered, heartily, and she immediately went out to see if she could arrange it.

"Certainly, madam," the steward replied to her request, when she supplemented it by slipping a tempting piece of silver into his hand, and half an hour later the young husband and wife were enjoying, for the first time, their tempting dinner all by themselves.

The remainder of the passage was very delightful, for Reginald recovered rapidly from the effects of his seasickness, but having learned wisdom from experience, he refrained from any further marked demonstrations of affection toward his bride.

Two weeks from their wedding found them in London, busily engaged in visiting the varous ponts of interest of that historic city.

One afternoon, upon their return from the Tower, Reginald found considerable mail matter awaiting him, and among it a cablegram and a letter from Constance. The letter he slyly slipped into his pocket to read later, when by himself.

Te cablegram he immediately tore open and read, when a mighty shock of grief and dismay thrilled him from head to foot, and a cry of horror escaped him:

"Mr. and Mrs. Alexander both killed February 20. Railroad collision. Burial to-morrow, 23d.

"NOEL SOUTHWORTH."

Only two brief lines, but what a terrible message to receive in that distant land! Both father and mother launched into eternity in an instant of time!

It was horrible, all the more so because there was no possibility of his getting back to participate in the last sad rites over his loved ones and to share his sister's grief.

He stole a look at the envelope of Constance's letter. It was postmarked the 10th—the day following his marriage—and was doubtless a reply to the letter he had written announcing his intention of marrying Marguerite and going abroad. He was almost paralyzed by the fearful news he had received, and felt as if he could hardly await the

arrival of a letter giving the details of the fatal accident.

Fortunately for him, Marguerite was not present. She had gone directly to her room upon coming in, to remove her street costume and dress for dinner.

Reginald was thankful for this, for he must have betrayed himself—he could hardly have concealed from her the shock he had experienced upon reading such sad tidings.

Should he tell her that he had received news of the death of his father and mother?

He had never told her anything about his relatives, and should he now speak of his loss it might lead to questions on her part which would have to be evaded and thus perhaps arouse her suspicions.

She had been so care free, so apparently content, if not really happy, since their marriage, that he dreaded to sadden her, and yet it would be very hard for him to conceal his grief from her observant eye.

"I must do it, however," he muttered. "I must not allow anything to trouble her—I must run no risk of arousing her suspicions regarding my identity. No anxiety must come into her life. I must crush back into my own heart this sorrow that has come upon me so like a whirlwind, and make no sign of it when I am in her presence."

He tore the fatal message into atoms and cast

them into the grate, where they were soon reduced to ashes.

Then he began opening his other letters.

One appeared to cause him some uneasiness, for he frowned and looked disturbed as he read it.

"That stock has fluctuated strangely of late," he muttered. "I am losing confidence in it. If it comes up again to par, I will sell out and have done with it."

As Marguerite did not make her appearance, he thought she might be resting after her rather wearisome day. So he repaired to the smoking-room, where, after lighting a cigar, he opened the letter from his sister and began to read it.

It was, as he had surmised, in reply to the one he had written announcing his intention of marrying Marguerite and giving his reasons for so doing.

Constance, while she did not exactly approve of the union, on account of the taint of insanity, wrote very kindly and sympathetically and spoke very tenderly of Marguerite, whom she deeply pitied because of her infirmity, without cherishing a particle of ill-will toward her because of her mad attack upon her.

"She was not accountable, poor girl!" she wrote, "and I hope that she may never remember it—at least more vividly than to imagine it a dream, as you say she does. But it was the strangest thing

in the world—the most unaccountable thing to me! What could have inspired her with such designs upon me? But I will not dwell upon it, and I truly hope, dear Reginald, that she may be entirely cured by the treatment you have in view. She is a beautiful girl, and no one would rejoice more sincerely over your happiness in winning a lovely and loving wife than your devoted sister."

"Well, my sister Constance comes pretty near being the sweetest little lady in the world, or I am no judge of character," Reginald Alexander mused, with a suspicious moisture in his eyes, as he refolded his letter and returned it to his pocket. "Not every woman would exhibit so lovely a spirit after having nearly lost her life at the hands of another. Poor little girl! I hope that husband of hers will prove a comfort to her in this time of trial."

He sat for a while longer, absorbed in troubled thoughts, but as he never left Marguerite long alone, he finally put them resolutely aside and returned to his own apartments.

CHAPTER XVIII

REGINALD AND MARGUERITE GO TO HOUSEKEEPING

REGINALD did not find it an easy matter to conceal the grief which filled his heart for the loss of his father and mother—those kind parents, whose tender love, wise and kindly counsels had guided him through childhood and youth, and been so helpful to him since he had reached man's estate.

Marguerite noticed his pale face and heavy eyes, in spite of his efforts to appear as usual.

She did not question him, but she was kindly attentive to his comfort and watchful to anticipate his needs.

She attributed the change in him to illness, and insisted that he should rest for a few days and leave sight-seeing until later.

About two weeks after Reginald received the cablegram there came a letter containing the details of the horrible tragedy which had so suddenly deprived him of his parents.

Mr. and Mrs. Alexander were on their way to Pasadena to join Constance and her husband, when

a bridge across a chasm in the mountains gave way and precipitated two coaches—a Wagner sleeper and a baggage car—a hundred feet below upon the rocks.

Seven persons were killed outright, and Mr. and Mrs. Alexander were among these.

Constance was nearly heartbroken over her loss, Noel wrote, and had been prostrated ever since from the shock.

The same mail that brought this letter brought others also, and more trouble to Reginald.

The railroad stock in which almost the whole of his father's wealth was invested, also the bulk of Noel Southworth's fortune, together with what he himself had been able to lay aside from his practice, had suddenly depreciated to almost nothing, and financial ruin stared him, as well as hundreds of others, in the face.

Here was a living trouble added to his grief for the dead to oppress him, while anxiety on his sister's account did not serve to lighten his burden.

He was sitting in the private parlor allotted to him and his wife, after the perusal of these letters and pondering the perplexing situation in which he found himself, when Marguerite entered the room, and was instantly startled by his pale and anxious face.

Going at once to his side, she said:

"Reginald, I am sure that something is troubling you. What is weighing so heavily on your heart? You have not been yourself for more than a week. Do you not think I have a right to share your trouble, whatever it may be?"

He looked up into her anxious face and smiled tenderly. If he had been forbidden to express his love for her by caresses, she could not keep it from shining in his eyes and through every expression of his face.

"Yes, I have been somewhat perplexed of late," he answered, "but I did not like to annoy you, so have kept it to myself."

"I am your wife, Reginald. I promised to share whatever ill might come to you," she quietly remarked, and her husband's heart leaped with sudden joy in spite of his sorrow, for she had never spoken of their relations in this way before. "Is it business trouble?" she concluded.

"Yes," he replied, thinking it best to tell her frankly of his losses, and thus perhaps keep her from suspecting his deeper grief. "All that I had, besides a handsome fortune in expectation, has been sunk in the failure of a certain railroad."

"Do you mean that it is utterly lost?" Marguerite asked.

"I still own the stock, but it has become comparatively worthless," he explained. "It is barely pos-

sible that it may some time take a start and be of some value; but it will probably be years before I can recover anything from it, if I ever do."

She stood by his side, gravely thinking over what he had told her, and he almost regretted having said anything about it to her. He could not bear that she should have the slightest care to brood upon or worry over.

"But money troubles are more easily overcome than some other," he went on, trying to smile and speak lightly. This will, of course, mean work for me, and I must get at my practice again without delay."

"Do you mean that you must go home?" Marguerite inquired.

"No, I could not think of that for a moment," he replied, decidedly. "Fortunately, my capital—my profession, I mean—is available in any country, and as soon as we can get settled somewhere I shall put out my sign and begin work again."

Marguerite took a step nearer to him.

"Reginald," she said eagerly, "you do not need to do that, and I cannot bear that you should give up your plans for study. I have abundance, and I want you to use it freely."

Reginald flushed to his brows at this.

'I could not do that, Marguerite," he said. "No

man who has any manliness would be content to live in idleness upon his wife's money."

"Pray do not speak so, Reginald." Marguerite returned in a pleading tone. "I should not have spoken as I have—I should not have said that 'I have abundance,' for it is yours as much as mine, since when I gave myself to you I also gave you all that I possessed," and as if to emphasize her plea she lifted one white hand and laid it upon his shoulder.

"Ah, but, Marguerite, you have never given yourself to me," Reginald sadly responded. "That is the one treasure which I covet and cannot have."

She flushed now a vivid crimson at his words, and he instantly reproached himself for having given utterance to them.

"Forgive me," he cried, humbly, as he reached up almost unconsciously and clasped the hand lying on his shoulder. "I should not have said that—you will think that I am not keeping my promise very well. But truly I cannot live idle and use your money."

"But you have been so good—so self-sacrificing to me; you have left an assured practice to come abroad for me, and surely it is no more than right that I should share with you," the young wife insisted.

"No, dear," he said, with a ring of decision in

his tones there was no mistaking. "It is very good—very thoughtful of you to suggest it, but I could not respect myself and be dependent. Besides, I love my profession, and I shall be far happier to be at work."

"But you were counting so much upon this year of leisure to study in the hospitals," Marguerite said, regretfully.

A shade of disappointment swept over the young physician's face at her words. But it quickly passed, and he turned to her with his usual genial smile.

"Do not let that trouble you," he replied; "that is a matter which will work itself right in time."

"There is one matter which will not work itself right, to my mind, and which I must speak of," she returned, with a quiver of something like passion in her voice. "If I had not married you there would have been a long account for me to settle with you; if you had left your business to come abroad with any other patient you would have expected handsome remuneration. Why should you not have it as it is? It is your right."

"Marguerite, I beg that you will never renew the subject again," Reginald began in a constrained tone. "There can be no such thing as debt and credit between you and me. You are my wife, and it is my duty, as it is my privilege, to care for you. Now, to change the subject, would it disappoint you very

much to give up further sight-seeing here in London and go immediately to Paris?"

Marguerite could not reply at once.

She was bitterly wounded because Reginald refused so resolutely to beholden to her when she felt under such heavy obligations to him. But after a moment she conquered herself sufficiently to reply, pleasantly:

"No, indeed; let us go as soon as you desire."

"Thank you. Can you be ready by the day after to-morrow?"

"Reginald, I can be ready in an hour," she responded, with sudden energy. "All that Norah and I need to do is to pack our trunks, and we can make short work of that."

"Well, I am sure that is getting down to business in good earnest," he said, smiling, "and in that case we can leave this afternoon. I will go at once and attend to my own arrangements."

He would have released her hand, which, strange to say, she had made no effort to withdraw from his clasp, but her fingers tightened over his.

"One thing more," she said in a low, eager tone as she leaned nearer to him.

"Well?" he questioned, with a sudden heart-throb of joy at her confidential manner.

"When we get to Paris do not let us board in a hotel," she said. "Cannot we take apartments

and make a little home of our own? I am sure it will be a great deal nicer than to live in this public way."

Again his face lighted.

"It would be very pleasant," he responded; "but, Marguerite, I do not wish you to have any care——"

"And that is just what I wish to have," she interposed, brightly. "It would give me some object—something to think about. Please, Reginald, let us try it, and if we find that it does not work well, we can easily give it up."

"Very well, dear, you shall do as you wish," he answered, disliking to oppose her, and thinking, too, that it was a very delightful project.

"Thank you. Now I will summon Norah, and we will have the trunks packed immediately," Marguerite responded, with a ring of energy in her tones that Reginald had never heard before.

"You really have quite a wise head for planning, Marguerite," he said, smiling as he arose, "and we shall save considerable time by getting off this afternoon."

That night found them in Paris, and two weeks later they were cozily settled in a quiet but pleasant locality, keeping house as nearly after the American plan as it was possible to do in France.

Marguerite had begged Reginald to give her just

one day, and take her around to select their rooms and the furniture they would need to put into them, as she told him, with a pretty air of mock independence, he might go about his own affairs and leave her and Norah to do the rest.

She seemed so eager and so delighted with the prospect of having a home of their own that he yielded to her, thinking it might be just the diversion she needed, and he at once set about making the acquaintance of the noted specialist with whom he had been for some time in correspondence regarding Marguerite's case.

He found him a very genial and sympathetic gentleman, and he at once confided to him the trying position to which he had found himself reduced since coming abroad, and his need of establishing himself in practice in Paris, if he was to remain there to have his wife treated.

The noted doctor became deeply interested in Reginald. He saw that he was no ordinary character himself, and, as it happened, one of the physicians connected with the hospital having died recently, he proposed that Reginald should assume his duties until he could do better for himself.

The young couple had been in Paris nearly two weeks when this arrangement was completed, and Reginald returned to his hotel, feeling quite elated, to tell Marguerite of his good fortune.

She seemed almost as much pleased as he, and after discussing his plans for awhile she looked up brightly, remarking:

"Well, Reginald, now we can be domesticated at last. Won't you be glad to be settled in your own home?

"Home!" Reginald repeated, with a slight quiver of his lips as he thought how his boyhood's home had recently been bereft. But quickly recovering himself, he added: "That word has a very attractive sound; but is it ready for us?"

"Yes, entirely ready, and so, if you please, Dr. Knox, we will take our dinner in our own dining-room to-day."

What could it mean? She was actually smiling and indulging in a little pleasantry, and Reginald's heart throbbed high with hope.

Surely she would get well in time. The cloud that had been hanging over her so long seemed to be lifting, and she really looked happy over the thought of having a home of their own.

She had been deeply interested in preparing it—almost absorbed, in fact, refusing all assistance from him whenever he had proferred it, telling him that he was not to enter it until everything was completed; that she and Norah, with the assistance of a man whom she had engaged, could do everything necessary.

Reginald was pleased to see her so cheerful, and began to feel that the entire change from the old surroundings and associations to gay, vivacious Paris, was going to be very beneficial to her, and now to see her actually smiling and really elated over giving him this pleasant surprise made him very happy.

They were soon on their way to their new home, and when they entered the pretty parlor which Marguerite and Norah had taken so much pains to make cheerful and inviting, Reginald looked about him in surprise.

There was nothing gaudy or elegant about it.

Marguerite, with a wisdom surprising in one so young, said it would be foolish to spend a great deal of money upon furnishings which in all probability they could not use more than a year or two, so she had selected everything with an eye to a homelike effect.

She had certainly made a success of her plan, and with the exquisite taste which she had displayed there was an air of elegance about everything in spite of its simplicity.

After inspecting the pretty parlor she led her husband through the chambers, of which there were three, Norah's having been arranged with as much care as the others.

Then they repaired to the dining-room, where

the table was daintily laid for two, and Marguerite informed Reginald that dinner was all ready to be served, and they would delay the inspection of the culinary department until later.

"Well, I give you credit for having accomplished wonders," Reginald remarked as he ran his eye over the pretty service, noted the little vase of flowers which made a bright spot in the centre of the table, and the general air of cleanliness and airiness there was about the room. "This is the most homelike place I have been in since I left my own home more than six years ago."

"Thank you," said Marguerite, flushing with pleasure, then added: "And now, if you will only tell me that the dinner is equal to your mother's cooking, I shall feel that I have indeed achieved success."

"But how have you managed about a cook?" Reginald inquired, with some interest.

Marguerite and Norah, who had come in, clad in a pretty white cap and apron, to serve them, exchanged confidential glances at this question.

"I think I have secured a treasure—at any rate, you will soon have an opportunity to test her ability as such," the young wife replied. "She says that she was taught in early life to do all kinds of plain cooking, while her present mistress, having had some

training in that line, is capable of giving her good, practical advice," she concluded, demurely.

Reginald made no reply to these remarks just then, but proceeded to test the steaming soup, which Norah now placed before him.

But when the girl withdrew from the room he gravely asked:

"Marguerite, do you mean that Norah is to do the cooking?"

"Exactly, and I assure you that you will find her first class. I did not want a French cook, Reginald."

"But who will do second work and wait upon you?"

"Oh, that matter has been arranged. I have some one else in view for that," she returned, indifferently, and then abruptly changed the subject.

Reginald thought no more about the matter until, several mornings later, he was obliged to return, after leaving the house, for something that he had forgotten.

He let himself in quietly and went directly up to his own room, where, to his astonishment, he saw Marguerite, a dainty white cap on her glossy brown head, a long apron tied about her waist, and gloves on her hands, sweeping away as vigorously as any maid of all work.

Her eyes were bright, her cheeks were flushed

with the exercise, and she looked as if she really enjoyed her employment.

Reginald stood in the open doorway, silently regarding her for a moment, with a curious mixture of amazement and admiration stamped upon his face.

She had not heard him approach, but she intuitively felt the presence of some one, and turning suddenly, an expression of dismay swept over her beautiful features.

"Marguerite, what does this mean? Why are you performing this menial service? Where is your second girl?" Reginald questioned.

She hesitated an instant, then she perched her head on one side, and assuming a saucy air replied:

"Here, if you please, sir. How do you think she will suit?"

Reginald was obliged to smile, she was so daintily pretty in her cap and apron, and with that delicious color in her cheeks. Then he asked:

"Do you mean that you do this work every day?"

She nodded, a little smile just curving her lips.

"Why do you do it?"

"Because I like it, for one thing. Being the daughter of a clergyman whose income was somewhat limited, I was brought up to have certain duties. And," she added, straightening herself a trifle, "since a certain self-sacrificing physician has

absolutely refused to share the fortune of his wife, I wish to make our expenses as light as possible."

"Marguerite, I do not like it. I can at least afford, and desire, to give you all the help that you need," the young man said, with a very serious look on his fine face.

"I do not doubt that, but"—with a little defiant flash in her dark eyes—"one does not like to receive everything and make no return. If you will not share my money I shall at least share your labors."

The man's face flushed hotly, while at the same time a feeling of almost ecstatic joy thrilled him at her resolute words; for to his yearning heart they seemed to contain a strong gleam of hope for him.

He took an eager step toward her, half extended his arms as if he longed to fold her to him, then, upon second thought, dropped them, and with emotion too deep for words turned abruptly and left the room.

Marguerite looked after him wonderingly.

"Can it be possible that I have offended him? she murmured, anxiously.

Then, as she recalled the light that leaped into his eyes and that impulsive movement as if he would have embraced her, a vivid flush shot over her face, and she began to wield the broom most vigorously again.

CHAPTER XIX

A TEST OF NOEL SOUTHWORTH'S CHARACTER

THE news of financial ruin, which had come to Reginald only to arouse his energies and spur him on to reclaim his position and surround his wife with every comfort and luxury to which she had been accustomed, fell with very different effect on his brother-in-law, Noel Southworth.

When the terrible intelligence that Mr. and Mrs. Alexander had both been killed in the railroad disaster had come upon them so like a thunderbolt, Constance was prostrated by the blow, and her husband had all that he could do to care for her in her wild grief.

But, shocked as he had been himself over the unlooked-for calamity, the thought that his wife would inherit a large amount of property from her father's estate had forced itself upon him in a very comforting way, and he forthwith began to lay numerous plans for a brilliant and luxurious future.

Then, following close upon the heels of the death messenger, had come the tidings of the financial dis-

aster and ruin which swallowed alike all of Mr. Alexander's large fortune and his own more moderate wealth.

This was one of the tests that try the souls of men—that prove the strength of the mental and moral calibre.

How would Noel Southworth, this favorite of fortune and society, stand the crucial test?

To do him justice, he shrunk from telling Constance of this new affliction while she was so prostrated by the loss of her father and mother, and for a time tried to keep it to himself, bearing the burden in silence.

But the true-hearted little wife was not long in discovering from her husband's gloomy appearance, his pale, unhappy face and nervous manner, that some other trouble was pressing upon his mind.

This served to arouse her from her own grief more effectually than anything else could have done; and coming suddenly upon him one day in an attitude of great dejection, she exclaimed in an anxious tone:

"Noel, what is it? Are you ill?"

He aroused himself, a look of annoyance sweeping over his face, for he had brooded so continually over his evil tidings and fallen into such a morbid state that he was beginning to experience a sense of personal injury from the fact that he was fettered

He had expected tears and repinings, for he judged her from his own standpoint, and he was somewhat surprised at the expression of gravity which settled over her face, and the look of calm, high resolve which gradually dawned in her clear eyes.

"I suppose, Noel, it will be hard to be poor," she said at last in a thoughtful tone. "It will be annoying and perplexing—at least at first—to do without a great many things to which we have been accustomed; but"—bending to look into his eyes—"we shall still have each other, and since we must meet this unexpected trial, let us try to meet it bravely. It will perhaps be harder for you than for me, but I will do all that I can to help you, if you will tell me how I may best do so, and I believe we can still be happy if we are poor, since love is left to us."

"Love!" he ejaculated, bitterly, and with an unreasonable feeling of irritation against her that she should appear so indifferent to the terrible change in their circumstances—"love will neither feed nor clothe us."

"No," Constance gently responded, though she flushed with pain at his cutting words, "but surely it will nerve us to meet this trouble and help us to bear it. Pray do not be troubled for me, Noel. I

shall not mind it so very much if you will only confide in me and let me be a help to you."

He knew that he ought to be grateful to her for her gentle sympathy and kindly encouragement; that he ought to admire her for her unselfishness and the brave, calm way in which she had received his information; but somehow it nettled him—it stirred a fierce, unreasonable anger within him to have her thus put out of sight every thought of self, and to be so cheerful and willing to take up the burden of poverty with him. Her courage shamed him.

"You are strangely indifferent, it seems to me, Constance," he irritably remarked. "You certainly cannot realize what poverty means, to speak in such a listless, passive way."

She regarded him with a look of surprise.

"No, I am not indifferent, Noel," she gravely returned. "I know that the situation is a very trying one, but I do not wish to make it harder for you than is necessary. What are your plans, dear, for the future?"

"I have none," he moodily responded.

"But if, as you say, we have lost everything, we must make plans for our future," she said, thoughtfully. "We cannot continue to live in this expensive way—we can do no more traveling. Shall we return immediately to New York and——"

"Go back to New York!" her husband scornfully

repeated, and turning upon her almost angrily; "go back among our fashionable friends, to be snubbed and sneered at and dropped on account of our misfortune! I guess not! I'll never show my face in New York again until I can hold my head as high as ever. I never could face our old friends to be pointed out as an object of pity."

A slight smile of scorn wreathed Constance's lips at this passionate reply.

"Our misfortunes cannot detract in the least from our worthiness to be as kindly received by our old friends as we ever were," she answered, with quiet dignity, "and no one merits the name who would renounce us on account of them. It seems to me, however, Noel, that you would be better able to secure a good position among people who know us than among strangers. That is why I suggested our going back to New York."

"How unconcernedly you speak of my securing a position, as if it were the easiest matter in the world for me to go to work to earn our bread and butter," he exclaimed in a bitter tone.

"Oh, Noel, pray do not speak so," Constance cried, with tears starting, and forcing back a sob. "I know that it will be very hard for you; but it must come to that, must it not? Then why ignore the fact? Why should we not face it courageously? You say that we have lost everything; but we must

live. We cannot live without an income, and to secure that we must work——"

"We!" interposed Noel, with something like a sneer curling his lips as he glanced at her white, jeweled hands.

"Yes, we!" repeated Constance, firmly, although she grew very pale, for she was deeply hurt. "I see no way out of our trouble save that you must secure a position of some kind, and I will try to sustain my share of the burden by making our expenses as light as possible."

The man was momentarily ashamed of himself, in view of his gentle wife's patient forbearance and fortitude.

"I am a brute, Constance, to talk to you so!" he exclaimed in a tone of self-reproach. "But, truly, I feel that it is hard lines to lose everything so at one sweep, and I cannot make up my mind to go back to New York—let alone the expense of the journey. I think we will go to San Francisco, where, perhaps, I shall be able to find a clerkship of some kind. Would you mind living there for a time?"

"No. I will do whatever you think is best, Noel, and I suppose you will want to go at once," his wife responded, with ready acquiescence, although she would have much preferred to go back to her old home, where she felt they would meet with warm sympathy from many of their old friends.

"There is no great hurry," he answered, shrinking from the approaching change in their manner of living. "A week hence will do, and there is that reception for next Tuesday that I do not like to miss."

Constance lifted a look of astonishment to his face.

"Surely, Noel, you do not mean to live another week in this expensive way when matters are so serious with us!" she said, chidingly. "As for that reception, I would prefer to give it up and save the money it would cost us, to spend for more necessary things. I was intending to buy my dress to-day, and the dressmaker was coming to-morrow. I shall do nothing about it now, however."

Noel was not pleased with this decided stand on the part of his wife, and tried to argue her out of it; but she was firm, and pleaded so earnestly with him to go immediately to San Francisco that he finally, although reluctantly, yielded.

They left the next morning for the city of the Golden Gate, where they arrived late on the afternoon of a dreary, cloudy day.

As they were alighting from the train a gentleman passed them on the platform.

He gave a start of surprise as he recognized them, stopped, turned half around as if he were about to speak to them, then changed his mind, and with a shadow of pain on his fine face passed on.

The gentleman was Laurence Everet.

"Perhaps they might not like to meet me just now," he murmured. "It must have been a terrible blow to them. I wonder how they will bear it? It seems to me that Constance is looking pale and careworn; but that is not strange under the circumstances. I hope he will be good to her. Poor child! she needs kindness now, if ever."

He cast one backward glance over his shoulder at the young couple, and saw them just entering the waiting-room of the station. He heaved a deep sigh and then went on his way.

A couple of days later Laurence was seated in the office of a noted private banking-house of San Francisco, when Noel Southworth entered the place.

Laurence slipped behind a screen, not caring to meet the young man, and waiting with some curiosity to ascertain what his business there might be.

He had come in to make a social call upon Mr. Worthing, the junior member of the firm, who was a personal friend of his, and was waiting until he should finish the letter he was writing, when he would be at liberty.

Noel Southworth approached the teller and passed him a slip of paper that had been cut from a newspaper, briefly remarking:

"I have called in answer to this advertisement."

The man glanced at the bit of paper, then at the young man, and courteously inquired:

"Have you had any experience in a banking house?"

"No, but I write a good hand and am a good accountant."

"You have references, I suppose?" the teller remarked.

"I am an entire stranger in this city, but I can refer you to reliable parties in New York," Noel replied.

"Hum! I——" the man began, looking doubtful; then, after glancing into Noel's face, he added: "I will speak to Mr. Worthing."

He left the young man and approached the gentleman who was writing at a desk behind the screen where Laurence Everet had taken refuge.

"There is an applicant for the situation we advertised yesterday," he remarked in a low tone. "He is a stranger in San Francisco, but says he can refer to reliable New York parties. I rather like his looks, but he'll hardly do, will he, without some one here to vouch for him?"

"Like his looks, do you, Lathrop? Well, your judgment is usually good," Mr. Worthing remarked in a confidential tone; then added: "Ask him to be seated for a few moments, and I will speak to him as soon as I have finished this letter."

The teller retired, and Mr. Worthing went on with his writing, completed his letter, and then arose from his chair.

"Worthing, one moment," said Laurence, in a low tone as he went about to go out to interview Noel. "I know this man; I saw him as he came in; his name is Noel Southworth. He has married the daughter of my father's most intimate friend—a Miss Alexander. Her parents were both killed in that shocking railroad accident about a month ago, while all their property, and Southworth's also, was swallowed up in the failure of the —— & —— Railroad; so that the poor fellow is probably driven to apply for this situation. The Alexanders were fine people, and I believe that Southworth stands well in New York. I know nothing about his capabilities, but if you can give him the place I shall be glad on his wife's account."

Mr. Worthing glanced curiously into the face of his friend. Something in the tones of his voice while speaking of Noel Southworth's wife gave him an inkling of the truth, and a look of sympathy sprung into his eyes.

"I will talk with him," he briefly replied, and then went out to interview Noel Southworth.

But for the intercession of Laurence Everet it is doubtful if the young man would have secured a situation with the house of Ames & Worthing.

But after the junior partner had conversed with him for a few moments he told him that he would take his New York references, and he might enter their service the first of the coming week.

Noel returned to Constance quite elated with his success.

The salary was not what he considered adequate compensation for his services, but he hoped that it might be increased after a time. At any rate, he was driven to work, and he was obliged to be satisfied with what he could get for the present.

Constance, like Marguerite, pleaded for a quiet little home of their own, but this proposition her husband would not listen to for a moment.

"Wait," he said, "until we can have one to our minds. I can never be content with one less elegant than the old home on Madison Avenue, in New York. I would prefer to board."

So the young wife was obliged to be content with boarding for a time at a third-rate house in an obscure street.

She, however, did her best to assist her husband by learning to do her own sewing and dressmaking, and became so ingenious with her needle, so tasteful in her designs, that Noel told her that she was more tastefully dressed than when she had an unlimited income at her disposal.

"Yes, more tastefully, but not better dressed," Constance told him, "for the material is not as elegant; but I am learning that taste and neatness will make up in a great measure for other deficiencies."

CHAPTER XX

A BRAVE AND FAITHFUL WIFE

It was a great change for Constance to be shut up in a gloomy, retired boarding-house, with a very meagre income at her command, when heretofore she had never known a wish ungratified.

But she was a brave and sensible little woman, with a sweet and sunny temper, and from the very first, as we know, she had shown a disposition to make the best of the sad change in their circumstances.

She indulged in no vain repinings, she made no complaints, but carried a cheerful and smiling face, even when she thought of her once happy home, of her fond and indulgent parents, who were now gone forever from her, and of her dear brother, from whom she was so widely separated.

She was always prettily dressed, and had a pleasant greeting for her husband when he returned from his labors at the bank, often looking weary and disgusted with himself and the world in general, for he was very proud-spirited and keenly felt the

necessity which had driven him to labor for his daily bread.

But he was not long in discovering that he had been exceedingly fortunate in securing a situation with the wealthy banking-house of Ames & Worthing, and anxious to retain it, since he must work, he put forth his best efforts in their service.

The firm were so pleased with him that at the end of six months, upon the death of one of their long-tried and trusted clerks, he was promoted to the vacancy with a considerable increase in salary.

Noel was so elated by this improvement in his circumstances that he determined to surprise Constance by giving her the "home of her own" which she had so craved.

He found a pretty flat in a pleasant portion of the city, and furnished it in a tasteful, even elegant manner, becoming so interested in the work that he unwisely exceeded his means and ran in debt for a great many things such as pictures, bric-à-brac, etc., which they could very well have done without.

When all was completed he invited Constance to drive with him one afternoon, and upon their return stopped at the apartment hotel where their future home was to be.

"I want you to make a call with me, Constance," he remarked, as he drew rein and prepared to alight.

"Upon whom?" she inquired, regarding him with some surprise.

"A young couple who have just gone to housekeeping," Noel replied. "I want you to see their home and tell me if you think you would like to live in the same way."

He assisted her from the carriage, and together they ascended to the second floor, where Noel rang a bell.

A neat servant girl soon made her appearance, and he inquired if her master and mistress were within.

Having already received her instructions, the girl replied, "no," but they soon would be—she had been expecting them for some time. "Will the gentleman and lady come in and wait?"

"Yes," Noel said, "we will be glad to come in for a while."

"And," the maid continued, with a sly smile at Constance, "perhaps the lady would like to look about the rooms."

Constance demurred at such a proceeding in the absence of the mistress, but Noel assured her that it would be all right—he was well acquainted with the proprietor, and so, preceded by the smiling maid, they made a tour of the rooms.

"It is a lovely little home," Constance said, with a wistful sigh, when they had inspected every apart-

ment, from the pretty parlors to the snug kitchen, "and everything is so convenient, all the rooms being on one floor."

"How would you like to go to housekeeping in apartments like this?" her husband asked.

"Oh, you know I should be delighted to have a home of our own, no matter how humble it might be," she responded, sweeping a longing glance around her; 'but I am afraid that anything like this would be too expensive for us."

Noel frowned, for her reference to the expense reminded him unpleasantly of the many unpaid bills which he would be obliged to meet by and by.

"Then you would be content with a home like this?" he said, putting the disagreeable thought behind him. "It does not compare with what you have been accustomed to, still it is really pretty and homelike, I must admit."

"Content, Noel! I believe I should be perfectly happy if this was to be our home," the young wife eagerly answered.

"Then be happy, my darling," the young man said as he leaned fondly toward her, his face beaming with pleasure over her appreciation of his work, "for it is already yours. I have been planning this as a surprise for you. Do you know what day this is, Constance?"

"My birthday!" she cried in a tone of amaze-

ment. "I had not thought of it before! Oh, Noel, do you mean that we are to live here?" and tears of delight sprung into her eyes.

"Of course I mean it," he responded, tenderly, "and I only wish that it were a thousand times better; but you shall have a more elegant home by and by if we are prosperous. I shall never rest until I can see you in one equal to that from which I took you," he concluded, with a note of bitterness in his tone.

"Do not be too ambitious, Noel," his wife gently returned. "I am sure one can be very happy in a modest way if one is only content, and I am sure this is much more than merely modest. I can hardly realize that it is ours, after all," she went on, smilingly—"that I am to be queen in this lovely house. What excellent taste you have shown in the selection of everything. The carpets are lovely and blend so nicely with the paper and furnishings. And what pretty pictures! I do not see how you have managed it all. I am afraid you have been very extravagant——"

"Do not trouble your pretty head about the 'how,'" the young husband smilingly returned, but with an impatient shrug of the shoulders. "Just make yourself at home, enjoy it and leave everything else to me."

They took possession the next day, and Constance

did enjoy it thoroughly, after her close, cramped quarters in the boarding-house. Both husband and wife seemed very happy in the change, and Constance felt as if the world bade fair to be very bright to them once more. Noel appeared more manly and enterprising than he had ever done. He had an object in life now, besides the gratification of his own selfish aims and desires, and if he had been content to go steadily on in this simple, quiet way all would have been well.

Three months after going to housekeeping the hearts of both were gladdened by the coming of a dear little girl, with eyes and hair like her father's, with the dimples and complexion of her mother.

Both Noel and Constance were very proud of their baby, whom they named Alice, after Mrs. Alexander, and of course, like all young parents, they built many bright hopes for the future, of which she was the sum and centre.

As time went on Noel, who had always been exceedingly fond of society, began to make acquaintances and to receive invitations to mingle in gay circles.

Constance would have preferred not to get into the world of fashionable life again, especially as she felt that their circumstances would not permit it; but Noel was very proud of her beauty, and insisted upon her accompanying him wherever he went,

consequently their second winter in San Francisco found invitations pouring in upon them from various quarters and a gay season before them.

Of course, the acceptance of hospitality from others necessitated a return of civilities, and then Noel discovered that a flat was not the thing—they must have a house in which to entertain their friends.

He finally found one to his mind, and then came the additional expense of furnishing it to suit his fastidious taste.

It was in vain that Constance remonstrated and protested again such extravagance, urging that they could not afford to support so much style upon their present income, and that she would much prefer to give up all society and live a quiet, simple life, rather than be obliged to carry a burden of debt.

At such times Noel would become irritable and even angry, insisting that it was his own affair—he had the bills to pay and best knew what he could afford.

To avoid trouble Constance yielded to him, although she did so with fear and trembling, knowing but too well that the future must bring a harvest of debt, care and anxiety.

She did all that she could to save by making all her own costumes, which Noel insisted must be as rich and elegant as other ladies wore, while she

also tried, in numberless ways, to keep their household expenses down to the lowest possible margin.

This kind of life did not seem so attractive to Constance as heretofore. She longed for something better and higher than the mere gratification of present impulses and desires and a constant round of excitement; she felt that these things should not constitute the chief end of life. She was fond of reading and study, and would have been glad to devote more time to the cultivation of her intellectual powers while, too, of late a sense of soul-hunger impelled her to reach out after something with which to feed her spiritual needs and aspirations.

Besides this, she was devotedly attached to her little one and longed to give her more personal attention, feeling that a great responsibility rested upon her in the training of her child. But whenever she objected to going to gay parties and places of amusements, pleading the needs of little Alice, Noel was offended and jealously accused her of caring more for the child than for him.

But a stronger reason than all these was the growing fear that her husband was learning to love the wine cup more than was good for him. Wherever they went in society wine was served to them as freely as water, and it was not an uncommon thing for Noel to become so elated by frequent potations

as to occasion remark, while he was beginning to grow stout and flushed, nervous and irritable, thus awakening in his wife the darkest forebodings for the future.

During this time Constance heard regularly from Reginald, who still remained in Paris.

He was working up a fine practice outside of his hospital duties, which he liked so well, while the experience was worth so much to him that he should postpone his return indefinitely. Marguerite was very much better—well, he called her—and grown to be far more beautiful than she had ever been when they knew her in New York.

Still, there was a certain reserve about all his letters which puzzled his sister, and she feared that he was not quite happy in his married life.

This thought troubled her at times, but there were anxieties of a more personal nature pressing upon her, and thus she could not dwell upon imaginary troubles regarding Reginald's domestic relations.

One afternoon Noel returned from the bank looking flushed and excited. He was very absent-minded during dinner, seldom speaking unless Constance directly addressed him, while he would start nervously every time the bell rang or a door was opened or shut.

He had lately resented all questioning about his

business; therefore Constance appeared not to notice that there was anything unusual about his manner, although she was really quite anxious regarding it.

After dinner he did not go to his club, as he was in the habit of doing when they had no social engagements, but walked the floor by fits and starts, while his eyes were so bright and restless and his face so flushed that his wife feared he was going to be ill, and longed to beg him to allow her to do something for him or to send for their family physician; but a feeling of timidity prevented her from doing so.

After putting little Alice to bed, she returned to the library with her work, hoping that she might be able to win him to something of cheerfulness by chatting socially with him.

She made two or three attempts, but without any success.

He replied to all her questions and remarks only in monosyllables, and then relapsed again into his absent state.

At last, feeling that she could bear the suspense no longer, she arose and went to his side.

"Noel, what is troubling you so to-night?" she asked as she softly laid her hand upon his shoulder, and bending her clear eyes upon his face.

"What makes you imagine that anything is troub-

ling me?" he sharply questioned, as he turned a startled look upon her.

"I do not imagine it—I know it," Constance replied. "You are acting unlike yourself to-night. You are either ill or something is troubling you, and I want you to tell me what it is."

"Don't let your imagination fly away with your good sense, Constance," he retorted, with a short, unnatural laugh, while he flushed a deeper crimson. "I am not ill, and if I am acting unlike myself, it is perhaps caused by the fact that I am dreading a trip which I have to make to Chicago to-morrow."

"Going to Chicago to-morrow!" Constance exclaimed, amazed.

"Yes," he briefly replied, but his glance shifted uneasily beneath hers.

"Why have you not said anything about it before?" she asked, looking pale and troubled.

"Simply because I did not know it myself until to-day. Unexpected business calls me there, and I shall be obliged to get away very early in the morning," he explained.

Still Constance was very anxious. He had never left her before since their marriage—he had never before been sent away on business for the firm during his connection with Ames & Worthing.

Somehow the fact struck her as being rather singular, while his manner since his return from the bank

impressed her with an unaccountable fear of some impending trouble.

"Are you going on business for the firm?" she inquired.

Noel started and darted a suspicious glance at her.

"For the firm?" he repeated. "Why, yes. What else should I go for?"

Constance knew that there was a branch house in Chicago, and so, supposing that his errand was connected with that, she tried to believe that it was all right.

Still he had conducted himself so strangely she was not wholly reassured.

"How long will you be away, Noel?" she asked, after a few moments of silence.

"I—I cannot tell exactly," he replied, shivering slightly as he rose and placed the blower before the grate.

"You will need a change of clothing?"

"Yes—just a few things in my grip."

"Very well. I will put them up for you," Constance returned.

Then going to his side, for he had remained standing before the grate with his back turned toward her, she said in a low, grave tone:

"Noel!"

"Well?" he asked, without turning his face toward her.

"Noel!" she repeated, and now she slipped around in front of him and laid her hands upon his shoulders, thus bringing herself face to face with him.

"Well, what is it, Constance?" he demanded, with an evident effort to retain his self-control.

"If a man is in trouble, do you not think that his wife is the one who can sympathize with him most truly?" she asked with a sweet seriousness that was very touching.

"Why, Constance, my dear girl, what are you driving at?" Noel cried, assuming a lightness of tone which jarred painfully upon his gentle wife's heart.

"You cannot deceive me, Noel," she responded in a tremulous tone, while she studied his face with her clear, searching eyes. "I know that something is weighing heavily upon your mind—you have not been yourself for weeks; but I am your wife, and I have a right to share whatever burdens you may have to bear. If we have been living beyond your income, I shall be only too glad to help you curtail our expenses in the future. If you are involved in any way, I have valuable jewelry which I am ready to sell to relieve you. Whatever your trouble is, tell it to me, I beg, and let me share it. Do not shut me out of your confidence when there is no sacrifice I would not make to help you."

The man bent and kissed her lovely, upturned face, but he was very pale now.

"Constance, you are the noblest little wife in the world, and I am not worthy of you," he said, almost passionately. "But I have no trouble which—you can share. Now run away and put up my things, for I must be off early in the morning."

He gently removed her hands from his shoulders, held them in a close, almost convulsive clasp for a moment, then quietly released them, and with a little sigh she turned away from him and went slowly upstairs.

Noel Southworth watched her until the last flutter of her silken robe disappeared from sight, then he dropped his head upon the mantel, while a stifled groan of despair burst from him.

CHAPTER XXI

NOEL SOUTHWORTH'S UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPEARANCE

WHEN Constance Southworth awoke the next morning she was surprised to find herself alone.

She was even more astonished upon discovering that the pillows beside her had not been disturbed—that her husband had not been in bed at all during the night.

After packing his grip with everything he would need, she had locked and strapped it; then, thinking that Noel would soon come up, she retired and soon fell asleep.

Now she glanced at the spot where he had set his valise.

It was gone!

With a strange heart-sinking she rose and, hurriedly dressing herself, hastened below.

She peeped into the drawing-room on her way, but no one was there. Everything was in the nicest possible order, and yet there was about the room an

air of desolation, a sense of something gone, that oppressed and saddened her.

She hastened to the library, glancing involuntarily at the spot where her husband had stood when she left him, as if she half expected to find him still there.

But the room was empty and everything in its accustomed place, though she instantly noticed that some of the drawers in the writing-desk were partially open.

She sprung forward with a startled cry to look into them.

They also were empty. Their contents, Noel's private papers, were gone!

With a face that was as pale as the soft lace that encircled her throat she went back into the hall and glanced at the hat-tree.

Noel's hat and coat were not in their usual place, his umbrella was also missing, and the dread truth forced itself upon her.

Her husband had gone without one word of farewell to her—had stolen from his own roof, like some thief in the night, without a kiss or even a pressure of her hand!

What could it mean? Why had he acted so strangely the night before? What was the meaning of this sudden and mysterious journey to Chicago? Why had he withheld his confidence from her, leav-

who waited upon them, with as much calmness as she could assume.

Then she devoted her attention to her little one, telling herself that she would surely receive a line from Noel before the day was over, confiding to her something of his plans and when she might expect him home.

She tried to think that she had been unjust in her suspicions that there was anything wrong in his way of leaving and for her lack of trust in him, but in spite of all, they would return again and again. The day seemed interminable and she was more wretched than she had been at any time since her marriage.

She grew so nervous before it was half over that she was tempted to go to the bank and make some inquiries regarding his absence and probable return.

Then she flushed hotly, with a sense of humiliation, as she realized that such a proceeding would betray but too palpably the fact that her husband had not trusted her, and perhaps give rise to the suspicion that their domestic relations were not as pleasant as could be desired.

No, she finally decided, she would try to wait patiently for a few days, when, doubtless, Noel would return and explain everything so clearly that she would laugh at her fears and wonder at her foolishness in having even momentarily entertained them.

She knew that often a great deal of secrecy had to

be observed in business transactions where large sums of money were involved, and there might have been some such reason for her husband's reticence in the present instance.

Still, the old thought would come back to torment her. Why, if such were the case, could he not have said so frankly?

She was not unreasonable—she would have trusted him implicitly—she would not have asked him a single question. But to steal forth from his home as if afraid of being seen; to leave her—his fond and faithful wife—and his beautiful baby girl without one word of regret or farewell! Oh! it seemed very strange—very unkind.

She took Alice out for a drive during the afternoon, hoping thus to kill time and banish, for the present, the many fears which beset her; but when she returned the house seemed so desolate and forsaken—almost as if some one had died there—that she wished she had not gone out at all.

She felt faint and almost ill, for she had scarcely tasted food the whole day, and even turned from the dinner-table with a feeling of repulsion and something of despair when she saw Noel's empty chair and wondered if he would ever come back again to occupy it.

She tried to reason that such morbid fears were foolish and wrong, and after she had put Alice to

sleep in her pretty crib, she took up an unfinished book, thinking she would read it through during the evening and thus drive disagreeable thoughts from her mind.

But she could not read—she could not fix her thoughts upon the story, interesting as it was. Finally putting it aside, she retired, and feeling too desolate to sleep alone, she gathered her sleeping child in her arms and sobbed out her misery and heartache until, exhausted, she too fell asleep.

But it was not a restful slumber, for she dreamed strange, weird dreams, waking from them every now and then in a state of fear and trembling that was absolute torture.

She imagined all sorts of dreadful things, she heard all kinds of noises, and was more weary when morning broke than she had been when she retired at night.

It was a night which she never forgot, and she was so pale and hollow-eyed when she went down to breakfast that the servant exclaimed in alarm and said she must be ill.

"No, I am not ill, Jane," she tried to say, cheerfully, "but I did not rest well. It is the first time that Mr. Southworth has ever been away from home, and I was nervous."

Sunshine brought something of courage and cheer, however, and she resolved that she would not spoil

the whole day by brooding over imaginary fears. She would set herself about some work and make the time count for something.

For Constance to resolve was to do, and she bravely took up some unfinished sewing, setting herself a task that would require great diligence to complete before the hour for lunch.

It was a dressing-gown which she had had Noel's tailor cut, and which she was going to make as a surprise for his birthday, which was near at hand.

She had planned to make some slippers also, and she now resolved that she would try to get both them and the gown done before his return.

She wrought busily all the morning, and actually began to feel comparatively cheerful again, with Alice toddling about and prattling in her interesting baby fashion.

At lunch time she felt really hungry and ate a hearty meal.

Afterward she went upstairs again, dressed herself and Alice for the street, intending to drive out to Golden Gate Park, for the day was lovely, and she believed that they would both feel better for having the air.

She looked very lovely when she was ready and started to go downstairs with her little one in her arms.

She wore a dark gray suit trimmed with steel, a

hat to match, with delicate pink roses to brighten it, and gloves the same color as her dress.

Baby Alice was all in white—"a dainty lily in a halo of gold," Constance said as she brushed the long, golden hair that fell like sunshine over her plump little shoulders, and the mother and child made a rare picture as they came down the stairway together.

Constance had just reached the bottom stair and put Alice down, when the door-bell rang a sharp peal, and the sound somehow seemed like a sudden blow upon the young wife's heart, driving every atom of color from her face and making her tremble in every nerve.

With a sense of impending evil she herself opened the door, without waiting for the girl to answer the summons, whereupon she found herself confronted by Mr. Worthing, the junior member of the firm by whom Noel was employed.

Constance's fair face lighted instantly, for she told herself that he had come to her with some message from her husband.

She greeted him with her habitual graciousness, and when he had shaken hands with baby Alice, invited him into her dainty parlor.

He followed her, bending a look of mingled admiration and pity upon her, which, fortunately, she

did not see or her fears would have been instantly aroused.

"You were going out, Mrs. Southworth," he remarked, as he took the chair she offered him.

"That does not matter at all, Mr. Worthing. I can go later just as well," she smilingly responded. "I hope Mrs. Worthing and the little ones are well."

She was so sure that he had come with good news that she could afford to spend a little time in exchanging courtesies with him.

"Very well, I thank you," he replied, "and I do not need to inquire regarding your health. You are looking remarkably well, and little Miss Alice also," which was the truth, for, with reviving hope, all her color and sparkle had returned.

"Yes, we are always well," she answered, and then was on the point of asking him if he had some message for her from Noel, when he forestalled her by inquiring, with some appearance of embarrassment, if Mr. Southworth was ill.

"Ill!" repeated Constance in a tone of astonishment. "Oh, no—that is——"

"Excuse me, but he was not at the office yesterday nor to-day, and fearing that he might not be well, I came around to inquire," Mr. Worthing explained, but with a slight hardening of the lines about his mouth.

begun to neglect his business, he feared it would come to that before a great while unless he changed his course, while he felt, on his wife's account, that he could not allow him to keep on, to bring sorrow upon her, without a warning word.

He now saw that Constance was oppressed by fears akin to his own regarding Noel's absence, but while he dreaded to confirm them and thus add to her anxiety, he felt that it was only right for her to know the truth.

"We have a branch office in Chicago, Mrs. Southworth," he said, "but I know of no business just at present which should call any one there from this city."

"Oh, Mr. Worthing——" Constance began in a tone of distress.

"It may be," he interposed, "that Mr. Ames had some reason for sending Mr. Southworth there upon some secret commission; but if he did so it was without consulting any one else, which would be a strange proceeding on his part."

"What can it mean? Oh, Mr. Worthing, what can it mean?" Constance exclaimed, with white lips and a face that was almost convulsed with pain.

CHAPTER XXII

CONSTANCE UNEXPECTEDLY MEETS AN OLD FRIEND

"My dear Mrs. Southworth, I beg that you will not give way to unnecessary alarm," Mr. Worthing remarked in a soothing tone. "Your husband may return in a few days and explain everything to the satisfaction of everybody. Meantime I will make inquiries at the bank and ascertain if he has been sent away. It is barely possible that Mr. Ames may have done so for reasons only known to himself. I will go directly to learn the truth," he concluded, rising.

"And you will let me know immediately?" Constance pleaded, with quivering lips.

"Indeed I will. I will not keep you in suspense one moment longer than is absolutely necessary," he responded, as he extended his hand in farewell. "And do not worry," he added, trying to speak cheerfully. "It will not help the matter in the least, and our fears, you know, may all be groundless."

Constance made no reply to this, for her heart was very heavy with forebodings, and her companion

felt a great pity for her, for a terrible suspicion had been creeping into his mind while he sat there talking to her.

He bade her good-afternoon and hastened back to his office, where, fortunately, he found his partner.

He told him what he had learned, and the face of Mr. Ames grew blank as he listened.

"There is something wrong about this," he remarked. "Southworth has been living very fast of late. We must set some one at his books immediately to see what he has been up to, and meantime we will telegraph to our office in Chicago and ascertain if he puts in an appearance there."

This was done, but at the end of three days, which would give Noel time to reach the city if he had gone thither, there came a reply saying that nothing had been seen of Mr. Southworth.

Another telegram was then sent to the police headquarters making singular inquiries, and commissioning those officials to look up the missing man if possible and communicate the result of their investigations at the earliest moment.

It was with a heavy heart that Mr. Worthing revealed to Constance the fact that her husband had not gone to Chicago, and the grief of the stricken wife was painful to witness.

She made no violent outbreak, but the look of shame and despair which overspread her beautiful

face was harder to witness than the most excessive manifestations of sorrow would have been.

"What shall I do?"

That was the only cry that rose from her when Mr. Worthing told her of the reply to his telegram; but it made his heart ache for her.

"Have you friends in the city?" he inquired, thinking she ought to have some one with her during this trying time.

"No, I have no friends," she replied in a hopeless tone; "my parents are not living. I have a brother, but he is abroad, and I cannot appeal to him. What can I do?"

"Mrs. Southworth, do nothing for the present," Mr. Worthing said, kindly. "Just remain quietly here and try to be patient until we learn something definite."

"How can I?" Constance cried, with a note of agony in her voice. "I am so afraid——"

"Afraid of what? Are you timid about staying here by yourself? If so——"

"Timid! I am not thinking of myself at all," she exclaimed, almost passionately, "but I am afraid—ah! to think that I should have to confess it!—I am afraid there is something very wrong about——"

"Hush!" interposed her companion, for he suspected what was in her mind. "Do not let us borrow trouble; let us wait a little—a few days may

reveal a great deal. But, Mrs. Southworth, you must not remain here alone. Let me send my sister to you."

"Thank you, but I believe I would rather be by myself for the present," Constance sadly replied, and feeling that she could not bear to have any one witness the grief which she could not control, and he, appreciating her sensitiveness, did not argue the matter further.

He begged her to command him at any time if she needed assistance, and then took his leave, with a deep pity in his heart for the young wife who had been so sorely stricken and so unkindly used.

Who can describe the suspense and anxiety which she endured during the ensuing week?

All inquiries failed to elicit any information regarding the whereabouts of Noel Southworth.

No such person had been in Chicago so far as the police could ascertain, and no clew could be obtained as to what direction he had taken on leaving San Francisco.

Investigations at the banking-house where he had been employed brought to light the startling fact that he had been, as was feared, a defaulter, and thus the reason for his flight was explained.

When Mr. Worthing, with all possible gentleness, broke this to Constance, she was at first literally

crushed before him, every particle of strength forsaking her.

She did not faint—she made no moan or cry—she was simply struck down as if felled by an unseen blow.

The gentleman gently raised her, seated her in a comfortable chair and brought her a glass of water, but did not attempt to comfort her, for he felt that he had nothing to offer in view of a grief so terrible.

"Thank you for your goodness," she said after a while and lifting her heavy eyes to him; "but may I ask you to leave me now and come again to-morrow, when I hope that I shall have myself under better control?"

He knew it was the kindest thing that he could do, and so, with a brief farewell, he left her alone with her grief. And what a grief!

She was a deserted wife and the wife of a defaulter!

The wife of a convict she would be, if her husband should be arrested and convicted of his guilt!

"He never loved me!" Constance moaned as she tried to face the situation and to think how she could live and carry this burden about with her during all her future life. "If he was reckless of the consequences to himself, how could he bear to bring such a taint upon his wife and child?"

Ah! it was a terrible grief, a fearful trial, for,

gentle and unassuming as she was, Constance was possessed of a pride that was as intense as that of royalty itself, and the shame and disgrace which Noel had thus brought upon her seared her soul like an iron heated to a white heat.

Then came the ordeal of the newspapers, which gave the usual amplified account of the affair, making the scandal as sensational as possible without regard to truth, and expatiating largely upon the "extravagance of a fashionable wife, who doubtless had helped thus to drive her husband to the desperate deed which had served to make him a criminal and banish him from his home and country."

This seemed only adding insult to injury, especially as Constance had never upheld Noel in any of his expensive whims; when, time after time, she had pleaded with him to dispense with numerous luxuries, to buy her no more jewels or elegant apparel, but try to curtail their expenses and live within their means.

But, of course, she was powerless to refute these slurs cast upon herself or resent the indignity to herself; she was, therefore, forced to bear in silence this added a dagger-thrust in her already sorely-wounded soul.

Thus she fought the battle out alone. She would admit no callers, she would see no friends, until the

first force of her grief had spent itself and she had regained something of self-control.

Then she sent for Mr. Worthing and consulted with him regarding what would be best for her to do in the future.

"I wish to give up my home," she told him. "I wish everything the house contains to be sold in a way to realize as much as possible, the proceeds to go toward canceling my husband's debt to you. I have some fine jewels also——"

"My dear Mrs. Southworth," the man began, his face flushing a painful crimson at the thought of taking from her money obtained in such a way.

But she interrupted him.

"I know it will be comparatively little," she said, sadly, "but it will at least be a beginning of what I mean to do in the future. The newspapers say that I drove my husband to this crime by my extravagance. It is utterly false. Still, if I live and have my health, every dollar shall be returned to the firm."

"Mrs. Southworth, you cannot mean to assume such a burden!" Mr. Worthing exclaimed, astonished.

"I certainly do," Constance responded, quietly but firmly.

"Do not think of it for a moment," her com-

panion replied. "Indeed, we could never accept such a sacrifice on your part. I shall be most happy to arrange for the sale of your furniture, if that is your wish, but the proceeds of the sale ought to be invested for the benefit of yourself and your little one. You must remember that you have another to provide for, and you should not impoverish yourself or overtax yourself for what you are in no way responsible."

Constance thanked him for his kind offer regarding the sale, but did not reply to his protest against her intentions respecting the disposition of the proceeds.

There was, however, a slight hardening of the lines about her mouth which betrayed some inward resolve.

She dismissed her servants and then gave up everything which her pretty home contained.

She realized far more than she had dared to hope, for Mr. Worthing had interested several of his friends, who bought largely and paid liberally for their purchases, and upon the very afternoon that the money thus obtained was put into her hands she started out to make her first payment toward the cancellation of the debt incurred by her husband's crime.

It was too late for her to go to the bank, for it

had closed; but she felt nervous about keeping so large an amount of money about her overnight, and therefore resolved to take it directly to Mr. Worthing.

His residence was a long distance from her own, and she was obliged to change cars in order to reach it.

As she stepped upon the first one she noticed that a burly, ill-visaged man followed her closely, and instantly it flashed upon her that she had seen him passing from room to room in her house during the sale of the furniture, and she had observed also that he did not bid upon anything.

He took a seat opposite her, and every time she glanced up she found his eyes fixed upon her in a bold, and, as she imagined, malicious stare.

When she alighted to make a change he did the same, and even presumed to assist her as she entered another car, following her and this time seating himself beside her.

She began to be very uneasy, all the more so from the fact that it was fast growing dark.

She was thoroughly frightened when she got out at the corner of the quiet, aristocratic street, where Mr. Worthing resided and found the man still at her heels.

With her heart in her throat she sped along the

sidewalk, hoping to reach No. 22 before her pursuer—for such she believed him to be—should overtake her.

It was now dark except for the street lights upon the corners, and the avenue seemed entirely deserted, although Constance strained her eyes in search of some one to whom to appeal in the event of trouble.

She almost flew over the ground, but those long, swinging strides behind her gained upon her rapidly, and suddenly she felt a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"Madam," said a low, stern voice in her ear, "if you value your life make no sound, and give me that roll of bills which you have in your possession."

Constance was a delicate woman, but she was also brave, and she resolved that she would make a bold fight for the money that was to help wipe out the terrible disgrace which had recently fallen upon herself and her little one.

By a dextrous movement she wrenched her shoulder from his grasp, and facing him with uplifted head and blazing eyes, she demanded:

"Who are you who dare accost a woman on the street like this? Leave me instantly or I will summon a policeman!"

"By thunder! you are a plucky one!" was the admiring rejoinder as the man's arm fell by his side

and he involuntarily recoiled a step before her. Then recovering himself, he continued: "There's no policeman about, and as I've had my eye on that money all day, I've got to have it; so just hand it over without any more palaver."

"Never! you shall never have a dollar of it!" cried Constance in a low, desperate tone, and wheeling suddenly away from him, she darted onward with the speed of a frightened fawn, up the avenue.

She might possibly have escaped him and reached Mr. Worthing's house in safety, the man was so taken aback by this dauntless proceeding, but a strong wind was blowing. It filled the long circular garment she wore and floated it back into the villain's very grasp.

He seized it, dragged her roughly back and thus nearly threw her off her feet.

For one dreadful moment she thought that her precious money must go; the next she caught the sound of some one opening the door of the house nearest her, and a ray of light streamed out upon the pavement.

"Help!" she called in a sharp tone of agony.

The wretch at her side swore a dreadful oath, swung one brawny arm around her, and strove to wrest from her grasp the small leather bag which she carried in her hands.

But she was desperate, and she fought bravely for her treasure, until suddenly she heard a groan of pain, and the next instant the scoundrel lay sprawling upon the pavement at her feet, while a strong arm was thrown out to save her from the recoil.

"Stand behind me," said a low, pleasant voice, and she found herself thrust behind a tall, symmetrical figure just as her would-be robber regained his feet and with a volley of oaths declared he'd have the heart's blood of the man who dared to strike him down.

"All right, sir, but two can play at that game," was the cool retort as a silver-mounted revolver was quietly leveled at the bully's heart before he could draw the knife for which he was fumbling among his disordered attire.

He was utterly taken aback by this unexpected proceeding, and instantly recoiled before the dangerous weapon.

"Right-about face, sir, and double-quick pace until you are out of sight," commanded the gentleman in sharp, incisive tones.

"D—don't shoot!" pleaded the highwayman as he slowly began to retreat.

"You miserable coward! you wretched assaulter of women, get you gone!" was the contemptuous retort, and without waiting for a repetition of the

command, the villain turned and fled down the street.

"Now, madam," said the gentleman, turning courteously to Constance and putting his weapon out of sight, "allow me to attend you safely to your destination."

Constance had not until that moment caught sight of his face, but now she sprung toward him with a glad cry.

"Oh, Laurie! can it be possible?" she exclaimed.

"Heavens! Constance!" the man cried, seizing her by both hands and bending nearer to search her face. "My dear—my dear old friend, why are you walking the streets of San Francisco at this late hour and unprotected?"

"I was obliged to come. I had an important errand with Mr. Worthing," she faltered, while her eyes drooped beneath the old familiar light in his which she remembered so well.

"You were obliged to come abroad alone at night! It is very unsafe—at least in this city," Laurence Everet gravely returned; then asked:

"Where is—your husband, Constance? Surely he should be here to guard you."

Constance shrunk from him in sudden pain, a flash of shame mounting to her brow.

"Noel! Oh! you have not heard!" she murmured, with quivering lips.

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In point of publication, "Darnley" is that work by Mr. James which follows "Richelieu," and, if rumor can be credited, it was owing to the advice and insistence of our own Washington Irving that we are indebted primarily for the story, the young author questioning whether he could properly paint the difference in the characters of the two great cardinals. And it is not surprising that James should have hesitated; he had been eminently successful in giving to the world the portrait of Richelieu as a man, and by attempting a similar task with Wolsey as the theme, was much like tempting fortune. Irving insisted that "Darnley" came naturally in sequence, and this opinion being supported by Sir Walter Scott, the author set about the work.

As a historical romance "Darnley" is a book that can be taken up pleasurably again and again, for there is about it that subtle charm which those who are strangers to the works of G. P. R. James have claimed was only to be imparted by Dumas.

If there was nothing more about the work to attract especial attention, the account of the meeting of the kings on the historic "field of the cloth of gold" would entitle the story to the most favorable consideration of every reader.

There is really but little pure romance in this story, for the author has taken care to imagine love passages only between those whom history has credited with having entertained the tender passion one for another, and he succeeds in making such lovers as all the world must love.

CAPTAIN BRAND, OF THE SCHOONER CENTIPEDE. By Lieut. Henry A. Wise, U. S. N. (Harry Gringo). Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

The re-publication of this story will please those lovers of sea yarns who delight in so much of the salty flavor of the ocean as can come through the medium of a printed page, for never has a story of the sea and those "who go down in ships" been written by one more familiar with the scenes depicted.

The one book of this gifted author which is best remembered, and which will be read with pleasure for many years to come, is "Captain Brand," who, as the author states on his title page, was a "pirate of eminence in the West Indies." As a sea story pure and simple, "Captain Brand" has never been excelled, and as a story of piratical life, told without the usual embellishments of blood and thunder, it has no equal.

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The "Gunpowder Plot" was a modest attempt to blow up Parliament, the King and his Counsellors. James of Scotland, then King of England, was weak-minded and extravagant. He hit upon the efficient scheme of extorting money from the people by imposing taxes on the Catholics. In their natural resentment to this extortion, a handful of bold spirits concluded to overthrow the government. Finally the plotters were arrested, and the King put to torture Guy Fawkes and the other prisoners with royal vigor. A very intense love story runs through the entire romance.

THE SPIRIT OF THE BORDER. A Romance of the Early Settlers in the Ohio Valley. By Zane Grey. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

A book rather out of the ordinary is this "Spirit of the Border." The main thread of the story has to do with the work of the Moravian missionaries in the Ohio Valley. Incidentally the reader is given details of the frontier life of those hardy pioneers who broke the wilderness for the planting of this great nation. Chief among these, as a matter of course, is Lewis Wetzel, one of the most peculiar, and at the same time the most admirable of all the brave men who spent their lives battling with the savage foe, that others might dwell in comparative security.

Details of the establishment and destruction of the Moravian "Village of Peace" are given at some length, and with minute description. The efforts to Christianize the Indians are described as they never have been before, and the author has depicted the characters of the leaders of the several Indian tribes with great care, which of itself will be of interest to the student.

By no means least among the charms of the story are the vivid word-pictures of the thrilling adventures, and the intense paintings of the beauties of nature, as seen in the almost unbroken forests.

It is the spirit of the frontier which is described, and one can by it, perhaps, the better understand why men, and women, too, willingly braved every privation and danger that the westward progress of the star of empire might be the more certain and rapid. A love story, simple and tender, runs through the book.

RICHELIEU. A tale of France in the reign of King Louis XIII. By G. P. R. James. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

In 1829 Mr. James published his first romance, "Richelieu," and was recognized at once as one of the masters of the craft.

In this book he laid the story during those later days of the great cardinal's life, when his power was beginning to wane, but while it was yet sufficiently strong to permit now and then of volcanic outbursts which overwhelmed foes and carried friends to the topmost wave of prosperity. One of the most striking portions of the story is that of Cinq Mar's conspiracy; the method of conducting criminal cases, and the political trickery resorted to by royal favorites, affording a better insight into the statecraft of that day than can be had even by an exhaustive study of history. It is a powerful romance of love and diplomacy, and in point of thrilling and absorbing interest has never been excelled.

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"Windsor Castle" is the story of Henry VIII., Catharine, and Anne Boleyn. "Bluff King Hal," although a well-loved monarch, was none too good a one in many ways. Of all his selfishness and unwarrantable acts, none was more discreditable than his divorce from Catharine, and his marriage to the beautiful Anne Boleyn. The King's love was as brief as it was vehement. Jane Seymour, waiting maid on the Queen, attracted him, and Anne Boleyn was forced to the block to make room for her successor. This romance is one of extreme interest to all readers.

HORSESHOE ROBINSON. A tale of the Tory Ascendency in South Carolina in 1780. By John P. Kennedy. Cloth, 12mo. with four illustrations by J. Watson Davis. Price, $1.00.

Among the old favorites in the field of what is known as historical fiction, there are none which appeal to a larger number of Americans than Horseshoe Robinson, and this because it is the only story which depicts with fidelity to the facts the heroic efforts of the colonists in South Carolina to defend their homes against the brutal oppression of the British under such leaders as Cornwallis and Tarleton.

The reader is charmed with the story of love which forms the thread of the tale, and then impressed with the wealth of detail concerning those times. The picture of the manifold sufferings of the people, is never overdrawn, but painted faithfully and honestly by one who spared neither time nor labor in his efforts to present in this charming love story all that price in blood and tears which the Carolinians paid as their share in the winning of the republic.

Take it all in all, "Horseshoe Robinson" is a work which should be found on every book-shelf, not only because it is a most entertaining story, but because of the wealth of valuable information concerning the colonists which it contains. That it has been brought out once more, well illustrated, is something which will give pleasure to thousands who have long desired an opportunity to read the story again, and to the many who have tried vainly in these latter days to procure a copy that they might read it for the first time.

THE PEARL OF ORR'S ISLAND. A story of the Coast of Maine. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. Cloth, 12mo. Illustrated. Price, $1.00.

Written prior to 1862, the "Pearl of Orr's Island" is ever new; a book filled with delicate fancies, such as seemingly array themselves anew each time one reads them. One sees the "sea like an unbroken mirror all around the pine-girt, lonely shores of Orr's Island," and straightway comes "the heavy, hollow moan of the surf on the beach, like the wild angry howl of some savage animal."

Who can read of the beginning of that sweet life, named Mara, which came into this world under the very shadow of the Death angel's wings, without having an intense desire to know how the premature bud blossomed? Again and again one lingers over the descriptions of the character of that baby boy Moses, who came through the tempest, amid the angry billows, pillowed on his dead mother's breast.

There is no more faithful portrayal of New England life than that which Mrs. Stowe gives in "The Pearl of Orr's Island."

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